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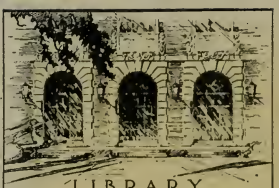

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THE LADY'S MILE

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET"

ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

LONDON

WARD, LOCK, AND TYLER

WARWICK HOUSE, PATERNOSTER ROW

M DCCC LXVI

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THE LADY'S MILE.

CHAPTER I.

MR. O'BOYNEVILLE'S MOTION FOR A NEW TRIAL.

THE Nasedale picnic, or the Nasedale archery-meeting, was a success; but it may be that the noble supply of sparkling wines, the gorgeous banquet of delicate viands, set forth under a spacious marquee, contributed as much as the excitement of the toxopholite contest to the gaiety of the day. Mr. O'Boyneville forgot his profession, and behaved as if he had spent the greater part of his existence at toxopholite meetings and picnics. Cecil heard more than one young lady declare that the Irishman was the life of the party.

and she had reason to be grateful to him for his delicate avoidance of her; even though her good taste might compel her to condemn his too obvious flirtation with more than one fair damsel in Lincoln green.

But if Cecil was glad to be released from the attentions of the Queen's Counsel, Cecil's aunt was by no means pleased with the altered aspect of affairs. She glowered upon the unconscious O'Boyneville from the distance whence she watched his proceedings, and was snappishly disposed towards the young ladies with whom he had flirted whenever they happened to cross her path. Once only in the course of the day had she any opportunity of addressing her niece confidentially, and then her manner assumed its bitterest shade.

"I hope you're satisfied *now*, Lady Cecil Chudleigh," she said.

And at night, when the long day's festivity and flirtation, and archery and croquet, and dust and sunshine, had at length come to a close, Mrs. MacClaverhouse was eager to attack her dependent. But Cecil stopped her at the first word.

"Pray do not say any more about this business, auntie," she said, in a quietly resolute tone. "If you are angry with me because I am unwilling to marry Mr. O'Boyneville, whom you wish me to marry only because he is rich, I must submit to your anger, and leave you. I will not stop with you to be persecuted upon such a subject; and if I have displeased you, I can only thank you for all your past goodness to me, and bid you good-bye."

If people ever said "Hoity-toity!" Mrs. MacClaverhouse was just in the humour to have indulged in such an ejaculation. But she contented herself with exclaiming,

"Well, I'm sure! The young women of the present day fly in a passion if you venture to say an unpleasant word to them. The world is moving on at a nice pace, upon my word. I wonder what the children of the rising generation will be like, and how *they'll* treat their mothers and aunts. I suppose they'll take the story of the Grecian daughter out of *those* children's story-books, and supply its place with 'The Obedient

Father,' or 'The Dutiful Grandmother,' or 'Parental Submission,' or something of that kind. You may go to bed, Lady Cecil; and since you are bent upon ending your days as an indoor pauper, you must go your own way, and I wash my hands of all responsibility."

The dowager carried matters with a high hand, but Cecil had vanquished her nevertheless; and though Mr. O'Boyneville had left Nasedale before the family met at the breakfast-table, Mrs. MacClaverhouse forebore to bewail his departure in her niece's presence. He had gone; but when his circuit work was over he came back again, and made himself a favourite with all the household. He had his own little study, and he had some of the judge's law-books carried thither for his use. He spent three or four hours every morning in hard work; and for the rest of the day was the life of the party, talking, arguing, disputing, putting down listless visitors, and laughing his great haw-haw laugh at their discomfiture; cross-examining pretentious talkers, and bringing them to shame; flattering frivolous matrons, expounding great

political theories with much flourishing of his white hands, delighting the Anglo-Indian judge by respectful attention to his anecdotes, offending and pleasing people a hundred times a day, and making himself the principal figure in every group, his voice the ruling voice in every discussion.

And in all this time Lady Cecil had no reason to complain of his presence. He was true to the quiet tone of resignation with which he had received her reproof on the first night of his coming to Nasedale. If he addressed her now, it was as nearly in the ordinary tone of polite society as was possible to this rough diamond of the British law-courts. Nor did he in any special manner seek her society. Mrs. MacClaverhouse sniffed ominously as she watched the eligible bachelor's attentions to other young ladies, while Cecil sat unnoticed and apparently forgotten by her late admirer. But the dowager refrained from remonstrance, and only allowed stray allusions to the horrors of genteel pauperism, and the miserable destiny of the unprotected female, to crop up now and then in her confidential talk with her niece.

And Cecil was satisfied. She had subdued her aunt, and had freed herself from the unwelcome attentions of an audacious adorer. She was inclined to feel kindly disposed towards Mr. O'Boyneville now that he no longer presented himself before her in the absurd position of a lover. She was able to appreciate his cleverness now that her aunt no longer harped upon the amount of his income. She owned to herself that many a girl in her position would have been glad to accept the hand and heart of this stalwart, good-looking, loud-voiced Irishman. She grew accustomed to his noisy laugh, his boisterous gaiety, his energetic declamation. His animal spirits in this rare holiday-time made him as boisterous as an overgrown schoolboy; and there is always something pleasant in the fresh joyousness of a schoolboy in the abstract, however obnoxious that member of society may make himself in the concrete. Lady Cecil, who had begun by thinking Laurence O'Boyneville the most unpleasant of men, came to consider him as a person whose friendship at least was worth possessing.

He had spent a week at Nasedale, talking every

morning of leaving before night, and lingering day after day until the week was out! But at last he announced his departure so positively, that to have changed his mind after such an announcement would have been a weakness unworthy a man of business. A vacancy had arisen in a certain northern borough, and some of Mr. O'Boyneville's friends had persuaded him to allow himself to be put in nomination. To linger longer in that garden of Armida called Nasedale would be to endanger this new ambition. Every body was loud in lamentation of his departure, with the exception of those younger and more superciliously indifferent gentlemen whom he had made a point of annihilating once or twice in the course of every evening.

The feminine portion of the community was not behindhand in the expression of regret. The young ladies declared they should miss Mr. O'Boyneville "terribly," "awfully;" one rather fast young lady went so far as to say "disgustingly." Had he not appointed himself the umpire of their toxopholite matches? Had he not learned the whole

art of croquet in half an hour, and then insisted on playing after a fashion of his own, whereby he had split a dozen or so of walnut-wood balls in a week? Had he not thrown them into convulsions of laughter one evening by conducting a mock trial of a case of breach of promise,—the broken pledge being that of a botanically-disposed young gentleman who had promised to go out for a woodland ramble with three botanically-disposed young ladies, and had gone partridge-shooting instead? Was he not the most delightful middle-aged creature in existence?—and not so dreadfully middle-aged either, for he could scarcely be forty—and what is forty, but the prime of life, the meridian of intellectual splendour?

To such discourse as this Cecil had to listen during the rainy morning which succeeded Mr. O'Boyneville's departure. The feminine assembly in the pretty old-fashioned painted drawing-room enlivened the labours of *décalcomanie* and Berlin wool-work with their praises of the departed barrister.

The matrons were as enthusiastic as their

daughters. Of all partners at whist there was no one they had ever met so invincible as Mr. O'Boyneville, although he had declared that he had not handled a card since his boyhood; and then he was so unlike the young men who call a middle-aged lady "a venerable party," and a sober married man a "dozy old bird." And then —and then—and then—there seemed no end to the feminine laudation of Laurence O'Boyneville. Only two ladies in that assembly were silent, and those two were Cecil Chudleigh and Mrs. MacClaverhouse. But an occasional impatient sniff from the dowager gave evidence of her state of mind.

He was gone, and every one was loud in his praise. He was gone; and though Cecil Chudleigh had only been accustomed to his presence within the last six or seven days, the place seemed to her just a little dull and empty without him, and she was fain to confess to herself that she as well as the others missed the sound of his sonorous voice, the gaiety of his boisterous laugh.

And from thinking of the departed Queen's

Counsel, she went on, by some indefinable train of thought, to pondering upon the dull blank life of spinsterhood and poverty that lay before her; to muse a little sadly upon the text of all her aunt's sermons — her lonely helplessness, her penniless dependence. The present was well enough so long as it lasted. She was happy, or, at any rate, content, even though the dowager's temper grew sharper, and the dowager's tongue more bitter, every day. She was resigned to the prospect of alternating between Dorset Square and watering-places and other people's houses for the rest of her life. But there were times when her pride revolted against the whole scheme of her existence, and a vision of the future arose before her, blank and terrible. She was such an unnecessary creature, such a mere waif and stray, to be drifted hither and thither on every tide which carried her kinswoman; a lady's-maid without a lady's-maid's wages; a slave without a slave's apathy.

"Perhaps my aunt is right after all," she thought, bitterly, "and I have been foolish to

throw away any chance that would have given me release from such an existence."

The day was wet, and dull, and miserable; the sort of day so harmoniously described in Mr. Longfellow's poem. The dead leaves fell from the dripping trees in the park, and the splash of the rain upon the terrace made a monotonous accompaniment to conversation. The gentlemen of the household had defied Jupiter Pluvius, and had set off at early morning, provided with waterproof garments and the clumpiest of shooting-boots, to wage war upon innocent young partridges in stubble- and turnip-field. But they came home at three; and after a tremendous luncheon and a careful toilet, presented themselves in the drawing-room, where they proposed an immediate adjournment for a game of billiards.

The young ladies were delighted to accept the invitation. Two or three good-natured matrons consented to join the party; while less vivacious dames discovered suddenly that they had important letters to write in their own rooms, which

important correspondence was popularly supposed to be the ladylike excuse for an after-luncheon nap. Mrs. MacClaverhouse was among the matrons who retired to her apartment.

"I suppose you'll come upstairs to have some tea at six, Lady Cecil," she said to her niece, whom she had addressed in this ceremonious manner throughout the visit of Mr. O'Boyneville.

"But you'll come and play, Lady Cecil?" cried one of the young ladies.

"No, thank you, dear; I, too, have some letters to write."

"I don't believe a bit in people's letters!" exclaimed the impetuous young damsel. "Letter-writing in country-houses is nothing but an excuse for being unsociable;—isn't it, dear Mrs. Mountjoy? If I were you I'd put up an inscription over my hall-door: 'No letters to be written on any pretence whatever.' I would do away with the post-bag, and oblige my visitors to correspond with friends at a distance by electric telegraph."

After which the lively damsel skipped off with her arm encircling her dear Mrs. Mountjoy's waist, and Cecil found herself alone in the drawing-room.

Of course she had letters to write—if she found herself equal to the labour of writing them. Where is the civilised being who can honestly declare that he or she has wronged no man in the matter of neglected correspondence? Cecil was deeply in debt to half-a-dozen lively friends who wrote her long descriptions of the places where they were staying, and were eager to receive her account of the place where she was staying, and the people whom she met there. She was in debt to Flo, who sent her voluminous epistles from Brighton, with pen-and-ink sketches of eccentric costumes to be seen on the King's Road, and caricatures of Mr. Lobyer in divers attitudes. He passed the greater part of his existence on the Brighton Railway, Flo told her friend. "And if the Brighton line were not the best in England, the unhappy being would be reduced to a state of imbecility by the effects of railway-travelling," added Miss Crawford.

Cecil meant to write her letters before the first dinner-bell rang; but when the billiard-players had left her, she sank into a luxurious easy-chair by the fire, and sat looking dreamily at the red coals. She was in one of those melancholy moods which come upon a woman sometimes without any tangible reason, but which are not the less sad because their sadness is vague and intangible. For the moment she abandoned herself utterly to sorrowful musings. The past—that shadowy past which always comes back to the gayest of us with a sorrowful aspect, returned to Cecil as she brooded over the low, neglected fire. Her father, her mother—the loved and lost—whose faces had once made the sole brightness of her life, looked at her once more out of the shadows. She thought of what her life might have been if her father's fortune had never been wasted. Before her sad eyes arose the picture of the home that might have been hers if her only brother had lived to mend his wild ways and hold his own among honest men.

"I should never have felt this bitter sense of loneliness if my brother had been my protector,"

she thought. "There is something in my aunt's kindness—even when she is most kind—that reminds me how little right I have to her love or protection."

Abandoned to such melancholy thoughts as these, Cecil kept little note of the progress of time. A servant came into the room to replenish the fire, but his coming and going did not arouse her from her sombre reverie. The dull afternoon sky grew duller, and her thoughts grew sadder as the sky darkened. A bell rang, but she took no heed of its ringing. What was it to her who came or went? In the utter solitude of her life there was no room for care, for there was no one upon earth except her aunt whose fate was in any way involved with her own. She heard a rapid footstep in the hall, a hand turning the handle of the door, and she shrugged her shoulders impatiently, knowing that she would have to put aside her sorrowful thoughts, to smile upon the intruder.

She looked up as the door opened, and it was with unmitigated astonishment that she beheld Laurence O'Boyneville.

"Mr. O'Boyneville! I thought you had left us for good?"

"And so I had, Lady Cecil, as I thought. But there are some places, or rather some people, whom it is very difficult to leave. I have been to London, got through a gigantic day's business, made arrangements for starting on my parliamentary work to-morrow instead of to-day, and have come back here—for an hour."

"For an hour?" echoed Cecil.

"Yes," answered the barrister, taking out his watch, and comparing it with the clock on the mantelpiece. "It's now half-past five by me; though it's only a quarter-past by my friend Mephistophiles and the ivy leaves. At 7.36 the up-train leaves that miserable shed called Disborough station. I was lucky enough to get a fly this time, and the antiquated vehicle is waiting for me."

"I fear Mr. Mountjoy has gone out," said Cecil, who imagined that her late admirer must needs have some important business to transact with his host, since only some affair of importance could have brought him back so hurriedly. "But

you will find almost every body in the billiard-room, and no doubt some one there will be able to tell you where he is."

"You are very good; but I don't want to see Mr. Mountjoy."

"You don't?"

"Not—" Mr. O'Boyneville was on the verge of saying "Not a ha'porth," but he substituted, "not in the least. In fact, I'm very grateful to the dear old fellow for being out of the way. I have come back to see you, Lady Cecil."

There was a little pause. Cecil could find nothing to say. The sense of Mr. O'Boyneville's power subjugated her as she had never before been subjugated. She was like the weakest of little birds who was ever spell-bound by the gaze of a monster serpent. Whether it was animal magnetism, whether it was the intellectual force of a dominant will, she never knew. From first to last, she knew only that Laurence O'Boyneville exercised an influence over her which no other living creature had ever exercised, and that she was powerless to resist his dominion.

The Irishman seated himself, and drew his chair close to hers.

"Cecil," he said, "why should we trifle with our destiny? In the first hour in which I saw you, something told me that you were to be my wife, and in pursuing you I have only obeyed the voice of my fate. I am not a romantic man, and the current of my life has taken its course between the most arid and blossomless shores that border the great river; but some remnant of my national superstition clings to me still; and from the first moment in which I looked upon you, I felt that you were something more to me than the crowds of pretty women whose faces have floated past me like the faces of a dream. You have thought me insolent, presumptuous! Believe me, Lady Cecil, I have been neither. It has been no confidence in my own merits that has made me so bold. I have been bold only because I believed in my fate. When I came here, I came at peril of hopes that had once been the brightest part of my life. The man whose dinner-table I left unceremoniously to come to this house is a man who can raise me to

the bench. I, to whom social life is almost as strange as it would be to an Ojibbeway, have wasted a week in knocking about wooden balls and holding bad hands at long whist. And I have done this because I wanted to be near you, Lady Cecil. I knew from the first that you were intended to be my wife, and that it rested with me alone to win you. Cecil, dear Cecil, are you going to fly in the face of your destiny?"

These were the tenderest words he had ever addressed to her. His voice, practised in every transition, sank to its most melodious tones as he uttered these last words. Perhaps there is some magnetic power in such a voice. Cecil, looking up at the earnest face that was bent towards hers, felt herself subdued by some wondrous fascination, and knew that she had found her master. Had he wooed her at any other moment it might have been different; but he came to her in an interval of depression, which had subdued her courage and crushed her pride. Never had the dull stagnation of her life seemed to her so dull and hopeless as it had seemed to-day. Never had the prospect of

the future appeared so utterly blank and empty. Her aunt's sermonising, her sense of loneliness, her yearning desire for some change in the routine of her profitless life, all conspired to strengthen the cause of Mr. O'Boyneville.

"Cecil, are you going to send me away again?"

"Suppose I do not believe in your fatalistic theory?" she asked, with a faint attempt at a laugh.

"Your incredulity will not help you. What is it the Turks say? 'Kismet'—It is written. You are to be my wife, Lady Cecil. It is only a question of time, and why should we waste time in discussion? Sooner or later the hour of victory will come. Cecil, you thought me an impertinent fool when I first told you of my love; you know me better now, and you must know that I am in earnest. I have kept myself aloof from you during the last week in order to show you that I can obey you. If I disobey you in coming back to-day, it is because I obey my fate, which is stronger than you."

Mr. O'Boyneville had composed this little speech during his downward journey, and was rather inclined to be proud of it.

"Cecil, what is to be my answer?"

For some moments Lady Cecil was silent, her head averted from Mr. O'Boyneville, her eyes looking dreamily at the fire. She was so lonely, so unprotected; and here was this man, whose intellectual power impressed her with a sense of protection and support; here was this man, whom she had scorned and rejected, once more at her side, too faithful to accept repulse, still eager to give her shelter and affection, to lift her from the dreary uncertainty of her position into woman's most fitting sphere. An hour ago, and she had felt herself so utterly friendless; and now here were the love and devotion of a lifetime lying at her feet, to be again rejected if she pleased. It seemed almost as if Providence, taking compassion upon her loneliness, had thrown this one last chance in her way.

Her voice trembled a little as she answered her lover.

"I do not know what I have done to deserve your love," she said; "but I suppose love never yet was measured by desert. I do know that I cannot give you what the world calls love in return. The only person I ever loved left me to marry another woman. He left me because it was his duty to do so; and I was proud of him because he was so good and true. He is married now, and I have every reason to believe he is happy. There is little chance that he and I will ever meet again; but if we do, we shall meet as strangers. It was my bounden duty to tell you this, Mr. O'Boyneville, before I answered your last question. Has my confession altered your sentiments towards me?"

"No, Lady Cecil; it has only made me admire you a little more than I did before. Do you think I expected to win the whole heart of such a woman as you, all at once? No, Cecil; when a man loves the woman he marries as truly as I love you, it must be his own fault if he does not teach her to love him before the end of the chapter, always provided she is a good woman."

"And you still offer me your affection?"

"I do. As heartily and as unreservedly as I offered it to you in the first instance."

"And you will be my friend, my protector, my counsellor, all the wide world to me—for I am very friendless—and will be contented with such gratitude and such affection as a woman gives to the best and dearest friend she has on earth?"

"More than content! unutterably happy!" cried Laurence O'Boyneville; "and by Jove it's a quarter to six, and it's as much as I shall do to catch the up-train," he added, in his most business-like manner, as he started to his feet. He only lingered long enough to take Lady Cecil in his arms, as if she had been a baby, to imprint one resounding kiss upon her forehead, and to exclaim, "God bless you, and good-bye, my darling!" and lo, he was gone.

"And I shall have a friend—a husband and protector—a home," thought Cecil, with a thrill of happiness, such as she would a few hours before have been slow to believe could have been inspired by Laurence O'Boyneville.

She was glad to be bound to some one, to have some one bound to her; glad to be the promised wife of this Irish barrister, whom she had so lately spoken of shudderingly as a dreadful man.

CHAPTER II.

CECIL'S HONEYMOON.

BEFORE the end of the year Cecil Chudleigh had become Cecil O'Boyneville. The barrister was not a man to lose time in making himself master of the citadel that had capitulated, and having once obtained Cecil's consent to be his wife, he moved heaven and earth to bring about a speedy marriage. The powers that be were in this instance represented by Mrs. MacClaverhouse and the Mountjoys. The dowager was delighted to marry her penniless niece to a man who confessed that his professional income was over two thousand a-year, and that he had invested between ten and fifteen thousand in certain very profitable railway shares, the interest of which he was prepared to settle upon Lady Cecil during his lifetime, while the principal would be hers at his death. The Mountjoys and

all the Nasedale visitors were delighted by the idea of a wedding, and young ladies who had heard of Cecil's engagement from Mrs. Mountjoy, and were anxious to disport themselves as bridesmaids, besieged the poor girl with entreaties, and bewildered her with their praises of Mr. O'Boyneville.

Against so much friendly persuasion, with the mighty O'Boyneville swooping down upon her suddenly by all manner of express trains, and by every complication of loop-line and junction, Cecil was powerless to make any successful resistance. She had promised to be his wife. She was grateful for his affection, and she looked forward with a sense of relief to the marriage which was at least to be the end of her dependence. And then Laurence O'Boyneville's influence was not without its weight. From the hour in which Cecil had promised to be his wife, his power over her had grown stronger with every moment she spent in his society. The strength of will which had carried him triumphantly over all the obstacles in his path sustained him here; the singleness of his purpose, the depth of his feeling, invested him

with a kind of dignity. That combined force of a strong will and a brilliant intellect had an almost magnetic influence over Cecil. If she did not love her future husband, she at least felt that it was something to be loved by such a man, and the strong current of his will drifted her along with it. Walking in the avenue at Nasedale, under a dull October sky, with her hand under Laurence O'Boyneville's arm, and inspired with some vague sense of protection by the stalwart figure that sheltered her from the autumn wind, Cecil consented that the wedding should take place early in November. She could not oppose her lover's wishes. From the moment in which she had accepted his devotion, Mr. O'Boyneville had in a manner taken possession of her judgment and her will; and it mattered little when he claimed her entirely for his own.

"You are so good, Laurence," she said once, "and I have such a sense of protection in your presence, that I sometimes fancy you are like a new father to me. Indeed, you have more influence over me than my father had, though I

loved him very, very dearly. I suppose it is because your will is so much stronger than his."

Mr. O'Boyneville nodded, and pressed the little hand resting on his arm. Another man of forty engaged to a woman of twenty-two might have been slightly disconcerted by Cecil's speech; but Laurence had implicit faith in the divine right of honest love, and in his thoughts there was no shadow of fear for the future.

"I must be a fool indeed if I can't teach her to love me, loving her as I do," he thought.

Backwards and forwards, by loop-line and junction, by midnight express and morning mail, rushing through the chill mists and fogs of autumnal dawn, sped Mr. O'Boyneville, all through that bleak October. He took his rest in snug corners of railway carriages, and lived upon sandwiches, peppery soups, and adulterated coffee. His electioneering business went on as smoothly as his love-suit, and provincial electors yielded readily to the beguiling accents of the Hibernian candidate. But the candidate's heart was at Nasedale, and he sacrificed his parliamentary ambition to his love for Cecil. He made light of

two or three hundred miles of cross-country travelling, if thereby he could obtain a quiet day with his future wife. To walk with her in the long avenue; to stand with his back to the fire, talking to her as she bent over her work; to drive her in a mail-phaeton, with a couple of merry girls in the back seat, and a pair of the most unmanageable horses in the judge's stables devouring the road before him,—these things delighted the man who had spent the best years of his life amidst the clamour of law courts, and in the dull quiet of dingy chambers. There was very little in common between himself and the woman he loved. But he had that dash of romance which the hardest friction of a practical existence cannot entirely obliterate from the composition of an Irishman; and he was really and truly in love.

So one misty morning in November the bells pealed gaily from the village church, whose Norman tower loomed dark above the leafless woods of Nasedale Park; and the Nasedale servants were gay and busy. It was to be a quiet wedding. Cecil had been earnest in her entreaties that there might be no unnecessary trouble incurred by her

cordial friends; but the childless Mountjoys were as pleased as if they had been arranging a daughter's marriage ceremonial.

"I shall be quite angry if you talk about trouble, my dear Cecil," said the kind-hearted hostess. "Here have Horatio and I been puzzling our brains to find out something or other to enliven the house in this wretched weather; and just at the very time when we were most at a loss for amusement and occupation, this marriage of yours happens to afford us both. You don't know what it is, my dear, to have nine marriageable girls in a house, with only three unmarried men, and those three more listless, and lazy, and stupid than words can describe, or you wouldn't talk of giving trouble. All I dread is the reaction which we shall suffer when it's all over, and you and Mr. O'Boyneville have gone to Ireland."

Thus it happened, that although it had been promised that the wedding should be a private one, the programme of the day grew to an alarming extent before the day arrived. The officers who had assisted at the archery-meeting were invited

to the breakfast, much to the delight of the nine young ladies, and much to the aggravation of the three listless young gentlemen, who gave utterance to the most crushing sarcasms when the martial visitors were alluded to, and affected to consider the profession of arms entirely incompatible with the faintest scintillation of intelligence, or the smallest modicum of education.

"Yes," drawled the most listless of the listless ones, "Captain Harduppe is a remarkably fine fellow. Of course it's a great merit in a man to be six foot two and three-quarters, and a merit which society is bound to recognise. But did any body ever hear the captain read? or did any body ever see the captain write? It's my belief that the greatest pull the Jew bill-discounters have over their military customers lies in the fact that they witness the agonies which the martial mind experiences in the process of signing its name; and it's also my belief that when a cavalry officer takes up the *Times* and throws it down again, exclaiming, 'Haw! nothing in the papaws to-day, I s'ppose,' he does so simply because he can't read."

Of course Mr. O'Boyneville, happening to overhear some such speech as this, arose in his might and crushed the scorner, proving that from the days of Cæsar, whom in the excitement of argument he called "Sayzer," to the time of the conqueror of Waterloo, soldiers had been even more renowned for the power of their intellect than for the prowess of their arms; and that the helmet and buckler of Minerva were only typical of the fact that from the earliest period of history, wisdom and valour had gone hand-in-hand.

Through the misty November morning went the train of carriages to the little church where Mr. O'Boyneville awaited his bride, after spending the night on loop-line and at junction, and after making a hurried toilet at the village inn.

There was no rain, only a soft autumnal mist, which took the fresh crispness out of tulle bonnets, and the artificial undulations out of feminine *bandeaux*. But the wedding was a success in spite of the weather. There was no weeping during the ceremonial, and it was only when the dowager kissed her niece in the vestry that one solitary

teardrop glittered in each of that matron's piercing eyes. The bridegroom was in the highest spirits, though in the midst of his gaiety a very close observer—if such people ever were to be found in a wedding-party—might have detected an undercurrent of deeper feeling near akin to tears.

There was the usual monument of crystallised sugar, and silver foliage, and artificial orange-blossom; the usual combination of the savoury solidity of Fortnum and Mason, with the airy frivolity and bilious sweetness of Gunter; the usual popping of corks, and pleasant sound of frozen liquids trickling into cool, fragile glasses; the usual protestations from young ladies who infinitely preferred tea or coffee to sparkling hock or moselle, but who, overcome by masculine persuasion, generally ended by drinking the latter; the usual open renunciation of her sex from the one fast young lady generally to be found in every party, who always happens to sit next an officer, and who tells him confidentially that she likes sparkling moselle, and doesn't believe in the girls who pretend not to like it.

Nor could the breakfast reasonably be expected to come to an end without a little speechifying. The judge, in a few appropriate well-rounded sentences, invoked for his guests all those impossible blessings which it is the fashion to pray for at a wedding-breakfast; while, in the heat of returning thanks for these good wishes, Mr. O'Boyneville was betrayed into speaking of his host as "his ludship," and on more than one occasion addressed his audience as "ladies and gentlemen of the jury." And by and by appeared the traditional chariot and post-horses, driven by that blue and antique postillion who seems to emerge from the shadows of the past only on such occasions. And then there was a little animated flirtation in the hall among the nine unmarried young ladies and the cavalry-officers; while the listless young gentlemen looked on with countenances expressive of unutterable scorn; and elderly Anglo-Indian merchants and lawyers, and red-faced Anglo-Indian colonels and majors gathered comfortably round their host at one end of the long table in the dining-room, telling old Anglo-

Indian stories, and laughing at old Anglo-Indian jokes.

In due time Lady Cecil came down the broad old-fashioned staircase, dressed in pale-gray silk, and wearing an airy bonnet that seemed constructed solely with a gray feather and a large full-blown blush rose, while the handsomest of her aunt's Indian shawls draped her slender figure like a classic mantle of scarlet and gold. Mrs. MacClaverhouse had insisted upon her niece wearing this shawl and no other.

"It's the last but one that stupid extravagant Hector sent me, and if I know *any thing* about Indian shawls, I know that this one must have cost him something like a hundred guineas; and as I'm not rich enough to buy you a wedding-present, you must take this, Cecil,—though why the fact of a person being married should oblige other people to half ruin themselves in the purchase of bracelets and dressing-cases is more than I can understand. However, that has nothing to do with you and me, Cecil. I'm your aunt, and your nearest living relative, so it would be hard

indeed if I couldn't give you something; and if you don't take Hector's shawl I shall be very much offended: and mind you don't go wasting your husband's money on trumpery Dresden china; for when I'm dead and gone you'll have more mandarin jars, and carved-ivory chessmen, and inlaid caskets, and envelope-boxes, than you'll know what to do with."

Whereupon Mrs. MacClaverhouse kissed her niece, shed one more solitary tear, which she brushed away sharply, and followed the bride down the staircase. And so it happened that Cecil went to her husband wrapped in the shawl which Hector Gordon had chosen in Calcutta three years before.

The traditionary chariot and post-horses drove away amidst a volley of cheers; and the very fast young lady, who was rather proud of her foot, launched a fairy bronze boot into the air as the bridal chariot departed, the heel of which fairy boot coming in contact with the eyebrow of one of the listless gentlemen, inflicted a blow that ultimately resulted in that vulgar appearance of

mingled blues and greens which is popularly described as a black eye.

The last which the Nasedale party saw of the bride and bridegroom was Mr. O'Boyneville's radiant face at the carriage-window, and Mr. O'Boyneville's big white hand waving a parting salutation. And then the Irishman realised the fondest desire of his later years. He went back to the land of his youth, and with his young wife by his side trod once more the country of his birth. He had consulted Cecil's wishes as to that honeymoon tour; but as he had previously revealed his own yearning for a glimpse of his native town, the river and mountains so familiar to his childhood, she set aside all thought of her own inclination.

"Let us go to Ireland," she said; "I know you wish to see your own country once more, and it will be all new ground to me."

"You really wish to see Ireland?"

"Really."

"Then we will go there—but only on one condition. There is a place in Devonshire I have

heard you talk of—the place where your childhood was spent. We will get across country somehow or other from Holyhead, and we will visit it together, Cecil."

She looked up at her lover, and smiled. Of all pleasures that he could have offered to her this was the sweetest. The thought was one of the inspirations of love.

So Mr. O'Boyneville took his wife to Ireland in the dull November weather. There are autumnal seasons in which "the rain it raineth every day" in this green isle encircled by the sea; and it seemed to Cecil as if a new deluge were about to blot fair Hibernia from the universe. It was no fitting season, nor had the barrister sufficient leisure for the ordinary pleasure-seeker's tour. The newly-wedded pair spent a few wet days in Dublin, driving in the Phœnix Park, where the autumn sunsets were very beautiful to behold in the brief intervals of the rain; and then one bleak early morning an express-train bore Cecil and her husband southward to Shannonville, and under the cloudy November skies Laurence O'Boyneville

once more beheld the city of his youth. He had looked forward with such a fond yearning to the day in which he should tread those familiar streets once more; and now the day had come, and the long dreamed-of pleasure was a very sad sensation after all. The glory of Shannonville had fled since the Irishman last had looked upon it, and the sight of its decay smote him to the heart. Modern civilisation and the mighty steam demon who makes naught of distance, and but little of time, had left Shannonville far behind. Commerce had no longer need of that far southern port; and where rich granaries had stored the wealth of southern Ireland, empty storehouses looked blankly on a deserted quay. There, where the vessels of many traders had jostled one another in the crowded docks, a fisherman's *Briccawn* was slackly moored by a rotting rope. The broad streets were standing yet, but the crowd that had once made them gay had vanished. The clubhouse was still called a clubhouse; but where were the noisy revellers who had once made its walls resonant with their boisterous laughter?

And the dashing young men, and the lovely blue-eyed maidens, whose presence had rendered the chief thoroughfare of Shannonville so delightful a promenade—where were they? Gone—gone! Only pinched faces looked up at the hotel-windows where Cecil gazed sadly out upon her husband's native city. Only squalor and misery, ruin and decay, greeted Laurence O'Boyneville as he walked slowly along the deserted quays, looking for the vanished brightness of his youth. He went back to his wife sick at heart.

"The place is as dreary as a city of the dead, Cecil," he said. "I have brought you to desolation and ruin, my darling. We'll leave Shannonville by the first train to-morrow morning. The sight of the old place cuts me to the heart."

But Mr. O'Boyneville grew tolerably cheerful by and by, and took his wife to dine with the oldest friends he had—the oldest surviving friends, for there was a sad list of the dead whom he had known and loved in Shannonville. Lady Cecil was pleased with the kind simple people, who received her with open arms, and were unceasing

in their praises of her husband's youthful virtues. The twenty years of his professional career seemed to melt away like a dream as he sat in that Shannonville drawing-room, where tall young ladies whom he had dandled in his strong arms looked at him wonderingly, and where youthful matrons, whom he remembered as tiny toddling children, brought their tiny toddling children to his middle-aged knees.

People talked as if events of a quarter of a century back had been the events of yesterday. "And don't you remember the picnic at Nikdeil-slootheram, Laurence?" "And I'm sure you've not forgotten the dance at Mr. O'Hennesy's, when Patrick MacShindy proposed to Flora Machrae in the little back-parlour, and old Mr. O'Kelly caught him on his knees?" "And don't you remember the murder at Castle Sloggerom, and Major O'Wokes riding fifty miles across country on his chestnut mare, Devil's-hoof, to take the scoundrel that did it? Ah, Laurence, Shannonville's but a quiet place now, and you'd scarcely know it if you came back amongst us again."

But even that genial evening amongst old friends could not quite restore Mr. O'Boyneville's spirits.

"I'm sure you won't care to stay here, Cecil," he said, as they drove home to the hotel; "and I think my heart would break if I spent a week in the place."

So in the bleak November, under another cloudy sky, and with another day's ceaseless rain pattering against the windows of the railway carriage, Cecil and her husband went back to Dublin, and from Dublin to Holyhead, and thence across country to Exeter, and then to Chudleigh Combe. Here there was no sign of decay, save the beautiful decay of nature. Commercial civilisation had never approached within twenty miles of the secluded old mansion half buried in the woods; and the eternal loveliness of nature is subject to no changes save those gradual transitions through which she passes for ever and for ever, serenely beautiful in every phase.

The old woman who had charge of the deserted mansion was very glad to admit Mr.

O'Boyneville and his wife; for the portly presence of the barrister, and the carriage and pair that had brought them from the nearest post-town, augured a handsome recompense for her trouble. She led the visitors through the empty rooms, where the atmosphere was chill and musty, and where the mice behind the wainscot scampered away at the sound of the intruders' footfall. The old-fashioned furniture had a wasted, half-starved look to modern eyes. It seemed as if the chairs and tables had been sentient things, and were slowly perishing from inanition. As the aspect of Shannonville had depressed Mr. O'Boyneville, so the cold dampness of this untenanted mansion depressed Cecil.

"I can't bear to see the dear old rooms looking so cold and cheerless," she said. "I can show you the very chair in which grandmamma used to sit; the little table on which I used to write."

She opened an old-fashioned square piano, and ran her fingers gently along the keys; but, tenderly as she touched the notes, the instrument

gave out a shrill discordant wail that was almost like the shriek of a banshee. But if the aspect of the place saddened Mr. O'Boyneville's young wife, her sadness was not all pain: there was a tender pleasure mingled with her regret.

"You could never guess how often I have seen the old place in my dreams, Laurence," she said, "amidst all the confusion, and contradiction, and absurdity that make dreams so bewildering. I have seen dead people restored to life, and have felt no surprise in seeing them. In a dream one always seems to forget that there is any such thing as death. I thank you a thousand times for bringing me here, Laurence. You could never believe how much I have wished to see the dear old home again."

"And now you see it in the hands of a stranger, and going to ruin, Cecil," said Mr. O'Boyneville. "The water comes through all the ceilings upstairs; and if the man who owns the place doesn't take care what he's about, there'll be a new roof wanted before very long."

But the old woman hereupon explained that

the ownership was at present vested in the Court of Chancery. A suit was in progress, and had been in progress for the last three years, on settlement of which the entire property was to be realised for the benefit of the disputants.

"And if the place is to be worth any body's buying, it had need be sold soon," said the old woman, "for the rain do come in here and the rain do come in there, and the wind do come in every where, and the rats gnaw holes in the wainscot, and eat their way through the flooring, and the windows rattle of a winter's night to that degree, that the house isn't fit for a Christian to live in."

"A few hundreds laid out upon it would make it comfortable enough," said the practical Mr. O'Boyneville; "but I don't see how the place could ever be worth more than a hundred a-year at this distance from London; and it must sell as cheap as rags to give you five per cent for your money."

"O, if I had only been rich enough to buy it!" she thought. She did not know any thing

about percentages or profitable investments; but if she had been free to do her own will, she would have given every sixpence she possessed in the world to be owner of Chudleigh Combe.

And yet she never thought of asking Mr. O'Boyneville to purchase the dwelling-place she loved with some portion of the money he had settled upon her. She had tried with all her might to prevent the making of that settlement, and had told her lover that under no circumstances could she ever bring herself to look upon the money as her own.

"I have very little use for what people call pin-money," she said, "for you know, Laurence, that I have been accustomed all my life to be economical. Let me have fifty or sixty pounds a-year for my clothes if you like, and I will dress as well as I have ever been used to dress. But I don't want to be extravagant because you are generous."

The barrister kissed his affianced bride, and told her that she was an angel, and that she dressed exquisitely; but the settlement was made

nevertheless, and Mrs. MacClaverhouse declared that Laurence O'Boyneville had acted nobly.

And during the visit to Chudleigh Combe he was very kind and very patient; though he examined the window-sashes, and sounded the partitions, and rattled the locks, and poked the ceilings, and peered up the chimneys, and jumped upon the floors with a view to testing the strength of the timbers, and altogether behaved in a more practical way than quite harmonised with Cecil's pensive spirit: but he gave her plenty of time for tender meditations while he prowled amongst stables and offices, tasted the water from a couple of pumps in a long stone courtyard, and measured the length and breadth of the grounds with a surveyor's accurate three-foot stride. It was only when the autumn afternoon was deepening into evening that he swooped down upon Cecil, as she stood on the lawn by a rustic basket—that had once held such a wealth of geraniums, and in which now only a few straggling sprigs of mignonette lingered amid a wilderness of weeds—and asked her sharply if she was ready to go away.

"Yes, Laurence," she said, "quite ready."

And then, as they walked back to the carriage, she said, rather to herself than to her husband:

"I wonder who will buy Chudleigh Combe?"

"Ah, so do I," cried Mr. O'Boyneville, swinging his stick; "he'll have to spend something like a thousand pounds upon the place before he makes it habitable, whoever he is."

CHAPTER III.

MR. LOBYER'S WOOING.

ANOTHER season had commenced. The carriages in the Lady's Mile were gathering thicker every day, though as yet there was not a leaflet on the trees in Hyde Park, nor a ray of warm sunshine on the Serpentine. January the bitter had given place to February the uncertain, when Florence Crawford tore herself away from the blusterous delights of the Brighton Esplanade, in obedience to her father's summons. She had been staying with some stylish friends, who had taken a house on the East Cliff; while William Crawford made the best of the dark short days, working steadily at a picture which was to be one of the glories of the Academy in the coming season.

Florence Crawford had not exaggerated her

wealthy admirer's devotion. Mr. Lobyer had spent the winter in perpetual rushing to and fro between London and Brighton. Another man, as deeply smitten as Mr. Lobyer, would have been content to have taken up his abode at Piccadilly-super-Mare, and to have devoted himself entirely to the society of his enchantress. But Miss Crawford's admirer could not altogether tear himself away from the companions of his bachelor life. There were winter races, and mysterious pugilistic meetings, and secret cock-fightings, and divers other entertainments connected with the animal creation, from the delights of which beauty was powerless to beguile Mr. Lobyer.

He wanted to marry Florence Crawford, and he meant to marry her. The more completely she held him at bay, and defied him by her coquetry and insolence, the more dogged he became in his determination to win her for his wife. He admired her beauty, her grace, her piquancy; and he thought it would be a fine thing to have such a woman seated at the head of his table, or sitting by his side in his mail-phaeton, with the most

thorough-bred of bull-terriers on her lap, and a forty-guinea tiger-skin over her knees. He admired every thing that was gorgeous and expensive, and out of the reach of that large class of humanity whose members did not possess bankers' books, and whom he contemptuously generalised as "cads." He admired Florence Crawford because, in his own phraseology, she was the best thing he had seen in the way of girls. But he had carefully considered the prudence of the step before he committed himself by any deliberate avowal of his admiration.

"I might marry a woman with plenty of money," he thought; "but then I shouldn't have much of a choice. I like to choose my horses and dogs, and I should like to choose my wife. Florence Crawford must have *some* money, for she's an only child, and those painter-fellows make no end of money nowadays; and as Crawford has been a widower sixteen or seventeen years, I don't suppose there's much chance of his making an idiot of himself by marrying again."

After regarding the matter with extreme deli-

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beration, Mr. Lobyer arrived at the conclusion that he might as well gratify his own inclination and marry the painter's daughter, whose bewitchingly disdainful airs gave a zest to his courtship.

So when Florence went back to the Fountains, she returned as the affianced wife of Thomas Lobyer; and she carried in one of her portmanteaus a casket of jewels which winked and twinkled in the cold winter sunshine when she lifted the lid to peep at her treasures.

She had left the East Cliff radiant with feminine vanity, bright with the golden halo of success; for her friends knew that before the year was out she would be mistress of Pevenshall Place and a West-end mansion; and she knew that they envied her good fortune. Mr. Lobyer's society was not eminently delightful; but Mr. Lobyer's mail-phaeton and thorough-bred steppers were absolute perfection. Mr. Lobyer's conversational powers were very limited; but the establishments of Brighton jewellers are more fascinating than any other jewel-shops in England, and are scarcely to be surpassed by the

glories of the Rue de la Paix. And Mr. Lobyer had been a liberal customer in Castle Square.

William Crawford had heard of his daughter's conquest, and had been congratulated upon the brilliancy of her prospects; but he had not taken upon himself to interfere with her arrangements. The manners and ideas of modern young ladies were something past the pure-minded artist's powers of comprehension. He remembered his wife with her primitive notions and womanly tenderness, so fond, so clinging, so loving, so girlishly sentimental, so quick to be pleased with any simple pleasure, so ready to be frightened by a harsh word, or moved to tears by a tender thought; and, remembering her, he was utterly bewildered by the daughter, who was so like and yet so unlike that lost darling. Whether the sentiments which Florence openly professed were the expression of her real feelings or only the fashionable cant of her sex, Mr. Crawford was at a loss to imagine; but the tone of her conversation gave him unspeakable pain. This daughter, who spoke of him as "a dear old party," and who pro-

nounced his best picture to be "awfully jolly," was so unlike the daughter he had dreamed of welcoming to the home of his prosperity.

He knew that she was charming; that slang from her lips took a new accent, and assumed a pretty quaintness in place of its native vulgarity. He had seen that her heart needed only to be awakened by some piteous appeal, some sorrowful spectacle, to reveal itself rich in all womanly tenderness and compassion. But she was not the daughter of his dreams.

"I am punished for my cowardice," he thought. "I was afraid to face the struggles of poverty with my child in my arms. I gave her into the hands of strangers, and I am fool enough to wonder now that she is strange to me."

Miss Crawford tripped into the painting-room immediately after her arrival at the Fountains, and elevated herself on tiptoe in order to embrace her father.

"You dear old darling, how you do smell of varnish!" she cried, after bestowing a kiss upon each of his cheeks. "Are you using copal for your

new picture?—dreadfully stiff stuff to work with, isn't it? And what *is* the new picture? You didn't tell me that in any of your letters, and I've been dying to know. I suppose I may look?"

Before the painter could reply, his daughter had planted herself before the easel, and was contemplating his unfinished work.

"As long as it's nothing about Marie Antoinette, Mary Queen of Scots, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, or the Vicar of Wakefield, I'm satisfied," she said.

She stood looking at the picture for some minutes, and then shrugged her shoulders impatiently as she turned to the painter:

"I must give it up, papa," she exclaimed. "It's rather nice; but you must have half a page of description in the catalogue if you want people to know what it all means."

It was the picture of a page holding a horse in a woody landscape. The page wore the costume of Charles the Second's court; but the loose tumbled hair falling about the fair neck, the small jewelled hand that grasped the bridle, the delicate

curves of the figure, the disorder of a dress that seemed to have been arranged by unaccustomed hands, and the shrinking terror of the pose, betrayed the sex of the pretended page. The attitude of the horse expressed as intense a terror as that which agitated the woman. The bright chestnut of his sides was darkened with sweat, the distended nostrils were flecked with foam, the eyes were dilated. The woman's face was exquisitely beautiful; but its loveliness was of the diabolical rather than the angelic order. The eyes of the disguised beauty were turned with a look of unspeakable horror towards a woodland glade, which stretched away in the background, and her disengaged hand was pressed convulsively upon her breast, as if to control the beating of her heart. On the grass, near the horse's feet, there lay an embroidered glove, and a cavalier's cloak, whose rich purple velvet and gold embroidery made a mass of colour in the foreground.

"Who is she, papa?" asked Flo. "Her dress is unutterably jolly, and her hair looks as if you had painted it with a patent tube of liquid sun-

shine. What a wonderful old thing you are! But allow me to inquire for the second time what it all means. A pretty woman doesn't dress herself in a ruby-velvet doublet and hold a horse in a wood without a motive."

"The woman is the Countess of Shrewsbury, who disguised herself as a page, and held the Duke of Buckingham's horse while he fought a duel with her husband. It's not a very moral story, and I doubt if I shall exhibit it."

"But you needn't tell people what it means, papa, and I'm sure they'd never find out. Call it Lady Rachel Russell. You can invent a story about an attempted escape of her husband, or something of that kind, you know. But if you've any difficulty about the picture Mr. Lobyer shall buy it of you, papa," added Florence, with a tone that sounded rather like patronage. She was quite capable of patronising her father.

"Thank you, my dear; the picture is sold already to a person who understands pictures," answered Mr. Crawford gravely. He was standing with his back to his daughter, washing his

hands in a basin that formed part of the paraphernalia of a stand on which he kept the implements of his art. The winter twilight was thickening, and the light of the low fire was hidden by a crimson screen. Flo stood in the bay window, looking out into the garden with a meditative air.

"You speak of Mr. Lobyer as if he were quite your own property, Florence," said the painter, as he walked to the fireplace and pushed away the screen. The firelight showed him his daughter's profile—her head bent, her eyes downcast, the small gloved hands trifling with her bonnet-strings.

She did not make any reply to her father's remark, and yet he could scarcely doubt that she had heard him.

"Do you really mean to marry this Mr. Lobyer?" William Crawford asked presently.

"I wish you wouldn't call him *this* Mr. Lobyer, papa," cried Flo impatiently. "What has he done that he should have a relative pronoun tacked on to his name, as if he were some new kind of wild animal. He has asked me to marry

him ever so many times, and—and I suppose I do mean to marry him, papa—if you have no objection," added Florence dutifully.

"If I have no objection!" exclaimed the painter. "What influence have the fathers of the present day over their children that their opinion should be asked or their wishes consulted? Don't look at me so imploringly. I am not angry with you, my dear. I am only an old-fashioned fellow, and there are many things I see nowadays that mystify me. If you like Mr. Lobyer, and Mr. Lobyer is, as he seems to be, very much in love with you, I cannot make any objection to your marrying him, though I will tell you frankly—"

"O, pray don't, papa," cried Florence,—"pray don't tell me any thing frankly; when people talk about being frank, they are always going to say something disagreeable. It's very odd that the truth always should be so unpleasant. I know what you were going to say, papa, almost as well as if you had said it. You were going to tell me that I may marry Mr. Lobyer if I please,

but that you don't like him, and that you never have liked him, and so on. The moment a girl is engaged to be married to a man, people seem to think they are privileged to abuse him."

"I don't wish to abuse Mr. Lobyer, my dear. If you are really attached to him"—Flo shrugged her shoulders impatiently—"and if you really think you can be happy as his wife, I have nothing to say against the marriage. I suppose if I were a very prudent man, I ought to rejoice at the idea that my little girl can never know what worldly misfortune is; but—"

"But what, papa?" cried Flo. She had untied her bonnet-strings, and had thrown the fragile structure of velvet and feathers aside in her impatience. The fact is, Miss Crawford had not returned from Brighton in the best possible humour, and her father's grave manner annoyed her. "The Hinchliffe girls were never tired of congratulating me, papa," she said; "and Mrs. Hinchliffe declared I was the luckiest creature in Christendom. And aunt Jane called—she has taken a house in Marine Square for the children

—and the Hinchliffes asked her to dinner, and of course they would tell her all about Mr. Lobyer, and she was delighted, and went away in such spirits, declaring that if I have a town-house she will make my uncle move from Russell Square to Tyburnia. But now I come home you snub me, and throw cold water upon me, and make me feel as if I were a kind of criminal. It's very cruel of you, papa."

"My dear child, I have no wish to be cruel. And so the Hinchliffes are delighted, and aunt Jane is delighted, because you are going to marry Mr. Lobyer. It is not because he is handsome, I suppose, for I have seen much handsomer men; and it can't be because he is clever, for I must confess that to me he seems rather stupid. Why is it such a grand thing to marry Mr. Lobyer, Flo? and why are the Hinchliffes envious, and aunt Jane in spirits? Is it because he is rich? Ah, to be sure, that's what it is, of course. He is rich, and we are a wealthy nation; and to marry the wealthiest bachelor of the season is the supremest felicity to which a young lady can attain.

I begin to understand it all now; but I am such an old-fashioned man, Flo, that I like the old idea of love in a cottage best."

"Papa," said Florence, after a pause, "mamma's marriage was a love-match, and she loved you very dearly—as you deserve to be loved, you dear disagreeable old darling—and I know that she never repented having married you; but when you were very, very poor, did you never feel sorry for having taken her from the comfortable home in Russell Square, and the carriage, and the servants, and the friends, and all that she lost when she became your wife?"

"Yes, Flo," answered the painter sadly; "God knows I had my hours of remorse and bitterness."

"But you had no need to be remorseful, papa," cried Flo, who perceived that she had touched too sad a memory, "for mamma loved you dearly, and she was happier with you than she would have been in a palace—even if people were generally happy in palaces, which, as far as I can ascertain, they are not. But I'm not

like mamma. I have been brought up among rich people, and the thought of poverty frightens me. I look at houses sometimes in which people exist, and are tolerably happy, I suppose, in their own miserable way; and I think that I *couldn't* live in such a house or in such a neighbourhood. Do you remember taking me up to some place near Islington to see one of Mr. Foley's pictures? Islington seemed like a new world to me, and I felt that I should commit suicide if I lived there a week. To be out of reach of the parks, to have no horse to ride, no pretty dresses to wear, no nice fashionable friends to visit, to ride in omnibuses, and wear old-fashioned bonnets, and go through life shabby and dowdy and neglected—O, what utter misery it all seems! I know all this sounds selfish and horrible, papa, but I have been brought up to be selfish and horrible."

"I daresay your feelings are perfectly natural, my dear," replied Mr. Crawford, "but I don't understand them. I don't understand you, I understand nothing about the age in which I live. All I can say to you is to implore you

to think seriously before you take so serious a step as that you talk of so lightly. It seems the fashion to talk lightly of solemn things nowadays; and no one would imagine from the manner in which people discuss a marriage that it was to be the affair of a lifetime. You are very young, Flory, and you can afford to wait. If you feel that you can be happy with Mr. Lobyer, marry him; but if you have the slightest doubt upon that point, let no inducement upon earth tempt you to become his wife. The unhappy marriages of the present day end in the divorce-court. But, as I said before, you can afford to wait."

"O yes, papa," cried Miss Crawford, "and while I am waiting and deliberating, some designing minx will pounce upon Mr. Lobyer and marry him before I know where I am. What a dear, unsophisticated thing you are, and what a dreadful worldly wretch I am, papa! But you see I am not so much worse than other people. There is your model Gretchen, your favourite Cecil Chudleigh, who was always lecturing me about my mercenary sentiments; yet you see,

after all, she has married a great lumbering Irish barrister, only because he has two or three thousand a-year."

"But Lady Cecil may be very much attached to Mr. O'Boyneville."

"Yes, papa," answered Flo pertly, "she may; but then, on the other hand, she mayn't. Attached to him, indeed!—a man whose coats and collars were made in the year one, and must have been old-fashioned then, I should think, if Adam had decent taste in dress."

"But he can change his coats and collars. And really O'Boyneville is a very good fellow, and a very clever one."

"Yes, papa, but what woman ever cared about such cleverness as that? A man whose greatest achievement is to cross-examine some stupid witness, and set a stupid jury laughing at his stupid jokes. No, you dear innocent parent, Cecil did not care two straws about that uncultivated Queen's Counsel; but she married him because he is well off, and can give her what people call a good home. A good home in Brunswick Square!

Poor Cecil, I am dying to call upon her, and hear how she endures her existence in Bloomsbury."

After this Miss Crawford contrived to turn the conversation. She talked of her father's pictures, —the Countess of Shrewsbury, the larger classical subject which he was going to finish before the first of May,—any thing and every thing except Mr. Lobyer: and after dining *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Crawford, Florence retired to array herself in blue gauze, and returned to the drawing-room to await a friendly dowager, who was to call for her at ten o'clock, and beneath whose sheltering wing she was to appear at a party to which Mr. Lobyer had also been bidden.

The master of Pevenshall Place and the Lobyer mills called on the painter next day, and made a formal demand for the hand of his daughter.

"You won't find me illiberal in the matter of settlements, Mr. Crawford," said the rich man, as the painter deliberated with a clouded brow and a thoughtful aspect. "Let your lawyer name his own terms, and fight the business out with my fellow. When I fall in love with a beautiful

woman I'm not the sort of man to spoil my chance by a niggardly policy," said Mr. Lobyer, whose tone was rather calculated to convey the idea that Florence Crawford was not the first beautiful woman with whom he had fallen in love.

But the painter was too much struck by the first part of the young man's speech to pay much attention to the latter portion.

"My dear sir," he exclaimed, "I daresay what you have just been saying is very generously intended; but you must remember that we are not making a bargain. My daughter is not one of my pictures, to be disposed of to the highest bidder; and I assure you I have my fancies even about the disposal of them, and don't always care to sell them to the person who offers me most money. If I consider your proposal at all, I must consider it as it affects my daughter's future happiness, not her purse. I suppose a settlement is a usual thing with a man of your wealth; and in that case I am willing that you should do what is fair and just, if you marry my daughter. But I cannot for a moment allow you to put forward

your money as an inducement to me, when you propose to become the husband of my only child."

Mr. Lobyer, for once in his life, was thoroughly astounded. Here was "a painter-fellow, who would sell you a picture, by Ged, sir, and thank you humbly for your patronage, ridin' the high horse and givin' himself the airs of a dook!"

This was what the great Lobyer said afterwards to his chief toady and confidant; but he was completely subdued at the time, and was fain to sue most humbly for permission to make Florence Crawford his wife.

"I do not see very well how I can withhold my consent," returned the painter, with a sigh, when he responded to Mr. Lobyer's very meekly-worded appeal. "You have already proposed to my daughter, and she has accepted your proposal —subject to my approval, she tells me very dutifully. I think it is rather too late for me to interfere, Mr. Lobyer, especially as there seems no particular reason why I should interfere. If my

daughter loves you, and if you love her as truly and purely as a man ought to love the woman he marries, I cannot say no. All I ask is that you will not be in a hurry, that you will wait—a year at the least. I want to know you better before I trust my daughter's happiness to your keeping."

But Mr. Lobyer protested that a year under such circumstances would be an eternity, or something to that effect; and after considerable supplication on the part of Miss Crawford's lover, who talked of himself in a dejected way,—"as the most devoted fellow that ever was, you know;" and as "a fellow who wanted to settle down in his own home, and all that sort of thing, you know,"—the painter consented that the year of probation should be reduced by one-half, and that at the end of six months Mr. Lobyer might claim his bride, always provided that his future father-in-law had reason to think well of him in the mean time.

After this the young man departed triumphant, but with a certain air of sulky discomfiture about him in the midst of his triumph.

"If a fellow were a pauper there couldn't be more row about the business," he muttered, as he stepped into that unapproachable phaeton which had been such a success on the West Cliff. "I never knew before to-day that fellows with half-a-million of money were so plentiful that people, whose daughters they want to marry, need turn up their noses at 'em."

Mr. Crawford went back to his painting-room, after the interview with his future son-in-law, very grave of aspect. He went to his painting-room for comfort as a devotee might go into a church. His largest easel occupied the centre of the room, with a great blank canvas upon it, while the Countess of Shrewsbury was turned ignominiously to the wall.

He took some dingy brownish tint from his pallet, and sketched the outline of a woman's form upon the fair white canvas. No map of confused and wavy lines preceded the perfect outline, but every stroke was sharp, precise, and permanent. Where other men indulged in a chalky network of vague curves and undulations,

William Crawford drew a firm and lasting outline with his brush. The long labours of years had made him the first of modern draughtsmen, as well as the greatest of modern colourists.

But to-day Mr. Crawford's work did not afford him that serene pleasure which it was his wont to feel when he stood before his easel. His brush was less rapid than usual; and after standing for some moments staring at his canvas without seeing it, he turned with an impatient sigh, and began to walk up and down the room.

"I do not like thee, Dr. Fell," he muttered, with his hands plunged deep in the pockets of his velvet morning-coat. "I'm not at all clear about the reason, but I do *not* like thee; and I wish—I wish—my pretty little impertinent Florence were going to marry any one else in this world rather than you, my worthy Fell. But the girls of the present day are past my comprehension—and the women too, for the matter of that. Yes, Mrs. Champernowne, the women too!"

The painter sighed more heavily than before as he said this. He took a little note from his waist-

coat-pocket presently, and from the half-listless, half-unwilling manner in which he unfolded the miniature sheet and glanced at the half-dozen lines inscribed thereon, it was evident that he had read the note before.

And yet it was no very important document. It was only a woman's epistle—half of remonstrance, half of invitation. But the tiny sheet of paper was a marvel of delicate emblazonry in the way of crest and arms, monogram and address, and the paper exhaled a rare and subtle perfume, as of myosotis or orange-blossom.

"What are you doing, Mr. Crawford?" began the painter's correspondent, in a hand which was firm without being masculine, bold and yet neat; a hand which had an originality and character of its own, and which once seen was rarely forgotten or confounded with any other caligraphy, —"what are you doing, and why have I seen neither you nor Florence since my return to town? I am anxious to hear all about your pictures for this season, or to see them; but I shall not come to your painting-room uninvited.

And in the mean time you and your daughter know where to find me.

"Always truly yours,

"GEORGINA CHAMPERNOWNE."

"Shall I go to her?" thought the painter. "I made up my mind to keep clear of her for this year at least, and already I am tempted to waver. She won't leave me alone; she won't let me work in peace, and forget her if I can. What is it to her that I have worked and waited for twenty years to win the place I hold? What is it to her? She likes to see me in her drawing-room, and to exhibit me to the people amongst whom she lives. I suppose I am a kind of lion in my way, and that she likes to show me in my cage. What does it matter to her if she distracts me from my work? It pleases her to keep me in an intermittent fever of perplexity and despair. What am I to her amongst a hundred admirers? I am only something different from the rest of them. She has her museum of lovers, as she has her cabinets of china, her collection of antique silver, her orchids, her Angora cats; and I am a

curious specimen of the genus painter—very hopeless. Shall I go to her to be fooled, as I have been fooled, year after year, ever since I have been worth a place in her exhibition? No, no, Mrs. Champernowne. *Nenni*, as the citizens of Ghent said to Philip van Artevelde. One might do something with Van Artevelde, by the bye, and the quaint old costumes, and the queer peaked roofs of the houses, and the infuriated *burghers*, clamorous for their leader's blood. *Nenni*, Mrs. Champernowne, I will not go near you. I have my great picture to paint between this and the 28th of April, and I have to hold my own against the critics; so I will send you my daughter with a pretty message, and I will invite you to my painting-room on the last day in April, with the connoisseurs and the amateurs, and the art-critics on the newspapers, and the unknown strangers who come to stare at the painter, under pretence of looking at his pictures."

But when Mr. Crawford had spent about three hours at his easel, he laid down his pallet and brushes, and looked at the clock upon the mantel-

piece—the infallible clock upon which weary models cast furtive glances as the day wore on, to see when another hour had expired, and another shilling had been earned.

"I can't go on any longer without a young person, as Flo calls my professional model," said Mr. Crawford; "and I think I should like to show *her* my sketch before I go seriously to work at the picture. Her taste is perfect, and she might suggest something; besides which it's getting too dark for work," added the painter, rather irrelevantly.

The "she" of whom he spoke so vaguely was Mrs. Champernowne, and he wanted to find an excuse for going to her. He took a small canvas from amongst others leaning against the wall, and slipped it into a green-baize cover. He rang the bell, told the servant to fetch a cab, and then retired into a dressing-room that adjoined the larger chamber, where he exchanged his velvet painting-coat for the broadcloth of every-day life.

CHAPTER IV.

DELILAH.

After driving about half-a-mile Mr. Crawford halted in a little lane leading out of the high-road, and within five minutes' walk of Hyde Park,—an obscure corner, in which one would scarcely expect to find a decent house, but which was, nevertheless, one of the choicest spots at the West-end. It was close to the park; and the maximum of earthly bliss seems to be involved in that fact. The painter alighted before a stout wooden door, set deep in a wall, above which appeared the branches of leafless sycamores. The garden within that circling wall was rather less than half-an-acre in extent; the house that nestled amid those leafless trees was only a cottage; but the rent which Mrs. Champernowne paid for this retreat was something like seven hundred a-year.

It was a retreat—a little hermitage half hidden amidst a dreary wilderness of stucco—a pearl of price amongst the meretricious splendours of Birmingham jewellers' ware—a place, whose parallel was not to be found within the charmed circle in which alone Mrs. Champernowne could exist—and Mrs. Champernowne's landlord knew the value of his treasure. Such a cottage and such a garden at Highgate, or Kew, or Ealing, or Isleworth, might have been worth a hundred and fifty pounds a-year; but such a cottage, within ear-shot of the sparrows of Hyde Park, was worth almost any thing its owner chose to ask for it.

Mrs. Champernowne was elegant, Mrs. Champernowne was fashionable. She was a widow—the widow of an elderly man, who had left her what was supposed to be an inexhaustible fortune. But it may be that this idea had arisen in the public mind rather from the reckless expenditure of the widow than from any exact knowledge of the late Mr. Champernowne's resources. With this gentleman had expired one unutterably an-

cient lineage, and in the person of his widow was represented another. Backward, through the misty regions of the past, Mrs. Champernowne traced the currents of her own and her husband's blood, winding, by separate ways, into the remote darkness of a legendary age. The history of modern Europe had a personal interest for the elegant widow, and Froissart was a family record. But she rarely spoke of these past glories. Only now and then, when the name of some aristocratic conspirator or court-poet, some distinguished politician, or general, or admiral of a mediæval age arose in a discussion, Mrs. Champernowne might be heard to murmur softly, as to herself, "His great grandson married my mother's great aunt;" or, "Poor fellow, how fond my ancestor Ralph Hyde's youngest daughter was of him! I have the ring he gave her the night before his execution,—a posy ring with the motto, *Memoria in æterna.*"

If Georgina Champernowne had secured for herself a certain position in the fashionable world, she had secured it entirely without effort. She

had pleased others by pleasing herself. During her husband's lifetime she had been buried alive in a gloomy old Northumbrian castle that rose black and bare above a great expanse of hill and dale, sparsely wooded here and there, and dignified with the name of park. Those who knew most about her—and even they seemed to know very little—declared that the elegant Georgina had known the bitter gripe of poverty's stern hand before she married Mohun Champernowne, of Champernowne Castle. Her father, Ambrose Arscott Pomeroy, was the last representative of a grand old Cornish family, and had carried his three sons and five daughters to a sleepy Belgian town, where the grass grew in the deserted highways, and where the halls in which mediæval commerce had displayed her richest treasures amidst clamorous crowds of buyers and sellers, served for the storehouses of petty manufacturers or the habitations of lonely old women. Georgina had been educated in a convent within a few miles of Brussels, at a cost of about forty pounds a-year, and had emerged therefrom more accomplished

than one out of twenty of the damsels who leave a fashionable finishing-school, where the annual stipend is something over three hundred. An accidental meeting between Ambrose Pomeroy and his old friend Mohun Champernowne had brought about the marriage of Georgina; and, after performing the duties of a devoted wife, and enduring the humours of an invalid husband and the unspeakable dulness of a Northumbrian mansion for ten years, Mr. Pomeroy's daughter found herself mistress alike of her own destiny and of every shilling that her husband had to leave. Her father had died within the last few years; her brothers and sisters had scattered far and wide, some doing badly, some doing well, but none of them holding their own in the sphere to which Mohun Champernowne's widow belonged. She was quite alone in the world. There was no one who had any right to question her actions or interfere with her caprices. She was thirty-two years of age, and in the dull period of her seclusion her taste had refined itself, and her intellect had ripened.

Then it was that Mrs. Champernowne came to London, and began to live her own life. For her, who had been so long an exile from society, the laws of society had little weight. She took a house in a fashionable neighbourhood because the neighbourhood was pleasant, rather than because it was fashionable. She sent for one of her nieces, and made the girl a permanent inmate of her house, not because she feared to face society without the protection of a female companion, but because she wished to benefit her sister's child. She rarely went into society. She was never seen at horticultural *fêtes*, or fancy-fairs, races, or lawn-parties; but at the private view of every exhibition of pictures, at the Opera, on the first night of a new piece at a fashionable theatre, at a few of the choicer morning-concerts in Hanover Square, the initiated recognised Mrs. Champernowne, and pointed her out to uninitiated friends as one of the most elegant women in fashionable London. She was not a dashing woman; no flutter of lace or rustle of silk, no musical tinkling of bracelets or bangles, or perfume of jockey club attended her

entrance into any public resort. Country cousins, staring at the patrician beauty of West-end belles and the splendour of West-end millinery, were apt to overlook Mrs. Champernowne; but if a connoisseur in the trifles of life had been told to look for the woman whose toilette most successfully combined the extremity of rigid simplicity with the perfection of elegance, he would inevitably have selected the widow.

This was the woman who had been one of the first to recognise the genius of William Crawford, who had given him a high price for one of his earliest successes, and who had been pleased to set him down upon the list of her intimates. And this last boon was no small privilege, for Mrs. Champernowne did not crowd her drawing-room with acquaintances of a season's standing. She lived her own life, and she chose her own friends.

The chosen few who had at first constituted her circle grew into many; but there was none amongst the many who had not some claim to distinction. If the door of the Hermitage had been freely opened to every comer, Mrs. Champernowne

might have found it difficult to sustain the tone of distinction which she had so unconsciously acquired. But in shutting her door upon people whose acquaintance another woman in her position might have courted, the widow invested her receptions with a piquancy which fascinated the privileged ones who were free to come and go as they pleased. To be free of the Hermitage was *d'être de Marly* over again; for once admitted within those walls all ceremony was done with. No invitation-cards ever issued from Georgina's fair hands. She was an inveterate tea-drinker; and to linger by her side as she dispensed fragile cups of egg-shell china that held about a table-spoonful, was to be carried back to the days of patch and hoop, and to be subjugated by the charms of a new Belinda—a Belinda of five-and-thirty years, well sounded, but the most bewildering of enchantresses nevertheless.

In the evening Mrs. Champernowne was at home to her intimates, and from ten until twelve the little lane leading out of the Kensington Road was luminous with the lamps of broughams.

"I reserve no particular evening for my inti-

mates, for I know so few people," said the widow —she always made a strong point of her limited circle—"and I so rarely go out. People know they can find me whenever they choose to come, and that I like to see them come in and out of my rooms as they please."

Placed on this easy footing, Mrs. Champernowne's friends found the Hermitage one of the most agreeable houses in London. The best music to be heard at the West-end was to be heard at Mrs. Champernowne's; the freshest photographs of new pictures, that had been the gems of the season in continental exhibitions; the last political pamphlet that had aroused the indignation of the Parisian police; the last comedy by Sardou or Augier, that had succeeded at the Française or Gymnase,—were to be found scattered on her table; and all the lions and lionesses of London roared their mildest roar for the pleasure of their accomplished hostess. Some delicate instinct of her own enabled her to discover nice people. She developed talents that had never been brought to light before. The ice of a reserved nature melted under her

genial influence; the most afflicted of bashful men found courage in her presence. People who were utterly subjugated by her fascination sought in vain to define its nature, and were content at last to declare her the most charming of women. Her intimates were pestered by the supplications of outsiders, who wanted to penetrate the magic circle; but that circle was not to be entered easily.

People pleaded hard to be allowed to introduce such and such a friend who was dying to make Mrs. Champernowne's acquaintance, but she was seldom charitable enough to say with Rogers, "Let him live." "Come to see me whenever you like," she said; "but don't bring me any strangers; I detest strangers. The only people I care to know are people I can know before I see them. I read a book, or see a picture, or hear a sonata on the violin; and I know in a moment whether I shall like the man or woman who writes, or paints, or plays. I knew by the turn of his Iphigenia's head that I should like Mr. Glendower the sculptor, and now he is one of my best friends. And there is Mr. Crawford," added the widow,

smiling sweetly as she turned to the painter; "I knew him intimately from the moment in which I stood riveted before that wonderful Aspasia."

It was at the call of this enchantress that Mr. Crawford had left his painting-room in the bleak February afternoon. He rang the bell, which tinkled with a subdued sound in the distance, for the genius of noise was banished from the Hermitage. Once within those sheltering walls, the visitor recognised an atmosphere which had nothing in common with the vulgar air without. A solemn hush reigned, as in a cathedral. No shrieking birds, no yelping lapdogs broke the serene stillness. A man admitted Mr. Crawford into a long glazed corridor, where there were hothouse flowers, the frailest of exotics, whose waxen petals glimmered whitely amidst foliage of dark shining green; and at the extreme end two marble figures seemed to keep guard over a pair of dark-green-velvet doors, which divided the corridor from the inner sanctuary. One of the statues was the Genius of Night, with starry veil and extinguished torch; the other, a Silence, with lifted

finger pressed upon closed lips. The subdued tone of the vestibule, the dark foliage and colourless petals of the exotics, the chill whiteness of marble against a background of sombre green, possessed a harmony of their own; and the visitor who entered the Hermitage for the first time felt, before he reached the end of the vestibule, that he was in no common abode. For the painter, acutely alive to the sense of external beauty, the surroundings of Mrs. Champernowne had an irresistible intoxication.

"Why do I come here?" he asked himself, as he followed the servant to the end of the vestibule. "There is an odour in the very atmosphere that stupefies and bewilders me. Take away a wall here and there, and open barbaric colonnades to the glare of an Eastern sun, and I can fancy Samson coming to visit Delilah in this house. I have half a mind to leave my card, and go away without seeing her."

The servant looked back at this moment, as wondering why the visitor did not follow him; and after a little movement of hesitation, Mr.

Crawford passed into the hall. Need it be said that Mrs. Champernowne's man-servant was not a common man-servant? He was a most gentlemanly creature, upon whom a livery would have been as much out of place as upon a bishop. A little powder in his hair was the sole badge of his servitude, and became him admirably. For the rest, his costume was such as might have been worn by the ideal curate or the poetic doctor of a young lady's novel. The grave dignity of his manner was more impressive than the concentrated insolence of twenty over-fed Jeameses. As you looked at him you were overpowered by a sense of your own inferiority. You felt instinctively that he had been intended for a higher sphere; that he, too, could number conspirators and court-poets amongst his ancestors; that his tastes were as refined as his manners and appearance; that he devoted his sabbath leisure to the perusal of the *Saturday Review*, and would have fainted at the sight of a *Daily Telegraph*.

The entrance-hall of the Hermitage was by no means spacious. A Persian carpet of moderate

dimensions covered the centre of the floor, and protected the unwary stranger from the slipperiness of a tesselated pavement. The same subdued colour which pervaded the vestibule reigned in the hall, where there were yet more pale exotics and antique bronzes looming duskily through the shade. Curtains of soft-gray silk shrouded a doorway, through which Mr. Crawford passed into the drawing-room, where there were again dark foliage and starry-white blossoms in the dim shade of gray-silk curtains lined with a pale-rose colour, that faintly tinted the subdued light, and where two white Angora cats were sleeping peacefully amidst the fleecy fur of a huge polar-bearskin spread upon the hearth. It might have been the chamber of the Sleeping Beauty which Mr. Crawford had penetrated; and to support the delusion, a lady with closed eyes sat half-buried in the softest and deepest of easy-chairs. But she lifted her eyelids as the gentlemanly servant announced Mr. Crawford, and rose to receive him. She was tall and slender—a stern critic would have called her thin. She was dark and pale,

with thick bands of black hair carried behind her ears, and gathered in a compact knot at the back of her head. If she had not been Mrs. Champernowne she would scarcely have been called handsome; but a plainer woman than she might have appeared beautiful amidst her surroundings. Whatever charm there was in her face was not to be traced to any perfection of feature; but in the shape of her small head, the perfect grace of her throat, the varying expression of her countenance, the refinement of her appearance, there lurked a charm rarely to be found in the splendour of perfect loveliness.

This was the woman who had enslaved many men, but for whom independence was too dear a treasure to be bartered lightly. She had been the slave of an old man's caprices, and had endured her slavery with all womanly patience and gentleness; but having won her freedom, she was not inclined to accept any new bondage. Her friends declared that she had refused more than one brilliant proposal within the few years of her widowhood, and she had already acquired the

reputation of a widow who would never choose a second husband. This was the woman whose fascinations were acknowledged by all who came within her influence, but amongst whose victims there were very few so utterly helpless, so entirely hopeless, as William Crawford.

He had begun by being grateful to her for that early recognition of his genius which had borne witness to her taste. He had allowed himself to be beguiled into a friendship for her, which speedily became the chief delight of his life. He had wondered at her; he had admired her; he had ended by adoring her. Whether she was fully aware of his weakness, or utterly ignorant of it, was one of the great perplexities of his existence. No word of his had ever declared his passion. He was content to be her friend and guest on sufferance. A word, and he might have been expelled from her presence for ever. There were times when he grew desperate, and was inclined to make the declaration which, as he thought, must inevitably banish him from the smiles of his enchantress, and thus make an end of his love and

his despair. There were times when he made a solemn vow that he would abstain from her society, as a drunkard vows that he will abstain from the fiery spirit that destroys him, and, like the drunkard, broke his pledge before it was many days old.

The idea that any other result than disgrace and banishment could follow the declaration of his love for Mrs. Champernowne never entered the painter's mind. Her grace, her fashion, her wealth, constituted a kind of royalty, which separated her from William Crawford as completely as if she had been a queen. Sometimes, as he worked alone in his painting-room, he thought of all the men who had been bewitched by the light of royal beauty's glances, and had suffered the penalty of their presumption. He thought of the legendary knight who loved Queen Guinevere, of Rizzio and Chastelard, wild Buckingham and fated Konigsmark, foolish Rohan and devoted Fersen.

Fanciful, as the man who lives by the cultivation of his fancy must naturally be, the painter

tried in vain to shut the image of his enchantress from his thoughts. The simplicity of his life, the singleness of his ambition, had preserved the freshness of his youth. He was as romantic as a lad fresh from college, and his worship of his divinity was pure and unselfish as the love of sentimental youth.

Mrs. Champernowne smiled her sweetest smile as she gave her hand to William Crawford. She was not a vivacious enchantress. Her feminine detractors had been heard to wonder what gentlemen could see in Mrs. Champernowne, who had really no animation, and gave herself the languid airs and graces of a person who was in the last stage of consumption. But the devotees who worshipped at the Hermitage found a charm in the widow's repose of manner which infinitely surpassed the frisky fascinations of livelier belles. The touch of her soft cool hand had a kind of mesmeric influence. The harmonious tones of her low voice were like the dropping of waters in some silvan fountain. She excelled rather as a sympathetic listener than as a brilliant talker;

but as she talked little, and never talked at random, she had a reputation for sound judgment and refined taste rarely accorded to a brilliant talker. For her adorers she was always charming; and though she was alike to all, there was so subtle a fascination in her manner, that there was scarcely one among her band of worshippers who did not fondly cherish the delusion that he was the most favoured, and that there were specially melodious accents and particularly delicious smiles reserved for him alone.

Accustomed, in the ten years of her wifehood, to study the whims and gratify the peevish fancies of an elderly invalid, Mrs. Champernowne had acquired the power of pleasing people who were hard to please. Never since she had reigned in her little world had she wounded the self-love of one of her subjects. People left her presence delighted with themselves, as well as charmed with her, and eagerly returned to renew the impressions that were only to be experienced in her society.

"I thought you were never coming to see me again," she said, as the painter seated himself op-

posite to her; "and yet you must know how anxious I always am to hear about your new pictures, and to see you," she added, in a softer voice; and then there was a pause, during which one of the Angora cats had crept to her knee to be caressed. There were disappointed worshippers at the Hermitage, who, in the peevishness of despair, declared that Mrs. Champernowne cherished her Angora cats with a view to the aggravation of mankind; and that she knew she never looked prettier than when one of her favourites was perched upon her shoulder, making itself into a fleecy-white background for the jet blackness of her shining hair and the pale olive of her complexion.

"I believe in the transmigration of souls, and that Mrs. Champernowne is Cleopatra," said a young poet whom the widow had admitted into the innermost circle of her intimates. "It's not to be supposed that such a woman as that is only meant to last half a century. There must be some principle of economy in nature by which the souls of the mighty are utilised. I know where to put

my hand upon all the great men of the past. I have dined at the Garrick with Shakespeare, and I can show you Snyders's house in St. John's Wood; and I have smoked a pipe with Murillo at Kensington, and have seen John van Eyck putting the last touches to his draperies on the Sunday before he sent his picture to the Academy. I used to lift my hat to poor Harry Fielding, who now lies buried at Kensal Green; and I have bought a cigar-case of genial-hearted Peg Woffington at a fancy-fair. Mrs. Champernowne is Cleopatra. You can see the Egyptian tint in her complexion after eighteen centuries; and her cats are lineal descendants from the sacred animal of Memphis. She sits in her easy-chair in the very attitude in which she sat in her galley when she went to meet Antony; and sometimes, when she is *distrait*, I fancy she is thinking of Actium."

In the presence of his divinity for the first time after some months, William Crawford strove in vain to suppress all semblance of emotion. She was dearer to him than he had ever dared to con-

fess to himself. He tried to beguile himself with the belief that he was only fascinated by her, that the admiration which he felt for her arose only from his artistic sense of her grace. But in her presence all reasoning was vain, and he knew that he loved her. To be near her was so deep a joy that he feared to speak, lest in some wild impulse of rapture he should reveal his secret. He sat opposite to her in silence, with the faint glow of the fire upon his face.

"I hope you have not been working too hard," she said presently, when the cat had clambered upon her shoulder, and she had leant her head against the soft white fur.

It was very little to say, and it was an expression of sympathy that William Crawford was in the habit of hearing from all manner of people; but from this woman it seemed so much.

"No indeed," he answered, almost sadly; "the error of my life is that I don't work enough. Do you know, Mrs. Champernowne, that since my good fortune I have sometimes wished myself back in my second-floor lodging

in Buckingham Street, in the blankest and dreariest interval of my life, only because then at least my mind was free for my work? I fancy that a painter ought to live on the top of a column, like St. Simeon Stylites; or if he is a sybarite, and must have shelter from the sun and rain, let him beg a lodging in the octagon tower in Windsor Forest, and spend his life there, with the keeper's children and the deer for his only society. I think the old painters must surely have lived lonely lives, and that the secret of their superiority to us must lie in the fact of their seclusion. We live too much in the world, and have too many distractions. The gleam of sunshine in a landscape, or the smile upon a face which we have been trying vainly to produce for weeks, is just beginning to beam upon our canvas, when a servant opens the door of our painting-room and tells us that Mr. Smith has called, and wants to see us most particularly, and will not detain us a moment. We groan, and go to Mr. Smith, who detains us a quarter of an hour; and when we return to our easel the power is gone out of

our brush, the divine light has vanished from our canvas."

In speaking of his art the painter had for the moment forgotten his enchantress, but all the old weakness came back to him as Mrs. Champernowne responded, with the low voice that seemed made to express sympathy:

"I can fancy how annoyed you must be when commonplace people intrude upon you. I hope you are going to do something great this year. You have brought me a sketch to look at: that is indeed kind. I feel such a privileged person when I see the germ of the masterpiece that is to delight the world."

The painter looked at the speaker half incredulously; but the gentle gravity of her manner gave evidence that she had no consciousness of uttering an exaggerated compliment.

"My masterpieces are very poor achievements, Mrs. Champernowne," he said; "and I shall begin to doubt the infallibility of your judgment if you show too much indulgence for my shortcomings."

"I believe implicitly in the genius of my friends, and I will cherish my faith as long as I live," answered the widow; and then she extended her hand with an impatient gesture. "Let me see your sketch, if you please, Mr. Crawford; and when you have told me all about it, I will make you some tea."

There was considerable discussion about the future picture. The subject was Cybele and the infant Jupiter, and the idea was taken from an old play of Thomas Heywood's. Relentless Saturn had commanded the destruction of the child, but the bright smile of the young god disarmed the hand that would have slain him.

Mrs. Champernowne was not a "gushing" person. She gave utterance to no rapturous praises of the sketch; but every word she said went to prove how deeply she was interested in the painter's workmanship. An inner door was opened while she was still bending over the canvas, and a bright-looking, blooming young lady appeared, and greeted the painter with frank cordiality. Some women might have feared the

rivalry of such a blooming niece as Miss Helen Vicary, but Mrs. Champernowne had no more terror of her niece's fresh young beauty than Mary Queen of Scots felt when she contemplated the charms of her four fair namesakes. She liked to have a pretty niece about her, just as she liked the sleek beauty of her Angora cats, the delicate tints of her gray-silk draperies, the turquoise blue of her Sèvres china.

"Tell them to send us some tea, Helen," she said; "I am going to give Mr. Crawford an old woman's entertainment;—and you know this is not the fashionable tea before dinner," she added, turning to the painter. "The rest of the world may eat supper at eight and call it dinner, if they like; but Helen and I dine at four, and doze by the fire till six, and then we drink tea for the rest of the evening. I know that a modern Brummel would be unutterably shocked if he heard our degraded mode of life; but my tea keeps me awake, and I am always ready to enjoy the society of my friends. I have no doubt that modern hours are very wisely chosen; for of course every

thing we do in the present is incontestably right, and every thing that was done in the past was supremely wrong; but I don't think the Hôtel de Rambouillet would have been quite so celebrated as it was, if people in those days had dined at half-past eight."

The Belinda tea-service was brought: a clumsy guest had once contrived to break one of the Belinda saucers, but not by the faintest contraction of Mrs. Champernowne's brow could the delinquent have divined the value of the fragile soft paste which he had shattered. The widow was never more charming than when presiding over her tiny tea-table. There was no hissing urn, no glittering kettle simmering noisily above a spirit-lamp; for urns and kettles are by nature fussy, and fuss and bustle were unspeakably obnoxious to Mrs. Champernowne. The gentlemanly man-servant brought a fresh teapot every ten minutes when his mistress had many visitors, and Helen, seated by her aunt, dispensed the cups to the tea-drinkers. Every one of the teapots was a gem in its way, and had an individuality of its own.

Mrs. Champernowne had a mania for teapots, and had christened her favourites by the names of illustrious tea-drinkers. There were Pope and Addison, Elizabeth Steele and Lady Mary Montague, Molly Lepel and Horace Walpole. No muscle of the gentlemanly servant's countenance relaxed when he was told that there was to be gunpowder in Lady Mary, and orange-pekoe in Mr. Pope.

The gentlemanly creature lighted a cluster of wax-candles and a moderator-lamp, and stirred the fire as softly as if the poker had been sheathed in velvet. No vulgar glare of gas ever illuminated the Hermitage. Moderator-lamps, burning beneath Parian shades, cast their chastened light upon the sombre green of the velvet pile, and waxen tapers twinkled dimly as in a chapel.

Mrs. Champernowne glanced at the clock on the chimneypiece.

"What time do you dine, Mr. Crawford?" she asked. "I mustn't detain you here while Florence is waiting for you at the Fountains."

"Florence dines in Bloomsbury this evening,

and I—I dined between three and four," said the painter, who had eaten three biscuits and drunk a glass of pale sherry at that hour. Was there any such thing as dinner for privileged creatures who were permitted to enter the sacred chambers of the Hermitage?

"I wonder whether she thinks I would leave her for the sake of the best dinner the united *chefs* of all the London clubs could devise?" he thought.

He stayed at the Hermitage, and drank innumerable cups of tea, and forgot that he had ever sworn to abjure the society of Georgina Champernowne. After tea there were new photographs to be looked at, and pleasant talk about the celebrities of the Parisian *salons*, and then the widow played the softest little bits of Mozart for the painter's edification. Peculiar in every thing, she had her peculiarity with regard to music, and played Mozart, and Mozart only.

"Other composers are very grand," she said, "but Mozart is grand enough and good enough for me. I find every thing that I care for in his

music, and don't care to go further. You know I am wicked enough to hate strangers."

Rossini and Auber, Beethoven and Mendelssohn, were amongst Mrs. Champernowne's strangers. The room filled in the course of the evening, and the painter stayed till eleven o'clock. He went very little into society, and Mrs. Champernowne was pleased to exhibit him to her friends. He knew that he was a slave amongst other slaves, who smiled as they contemplated one another's fetters. But in the siren's presence he gave himself up to the sweet intoxication of her influence. To-night she was especially gracious to him, though even when most gracious she contrived to avoid any thing like exclusiveness.

"You are my prodigal son," she said. "I began to think that I was never to see you again."

Throughout all the evening she said nothing worth recording. She sat in the midst of handsomer women than herself, and gave place while cleverer women talked their best; but those who left her presence remembered her and her only; and there were many who would have sym-

pathised with William Crawford as he walked slowly homeward through the highways and by-ways of Kensington, pondering upon his enchantress.

"Why should I avoid her if it is such happiness to me to be near her?" he thought. "I have no foolish hope that she will ever be more to me than she is now. It ought to be enough for me to see her now and then, to spend such an evening as I have spent to-night, and to go back to my work all the better for so bright an interval of happiness. What can I want more than that, or what could be more delightful—while it lasts? But when I am old and gray and purblind, and have painted half-a-dozen bad pictures, and the public are tired of me, and the critics call my colour flimsy, and insolent young painters begin to talk of poor old William Crawford, who was once such a great card, will Mrs. Champernowne let me spend my evenings at the Hermitage *then?*"

CHAPTER V.

AT HOME IN BLOOMSBURY.

THE slow days, the long weeks, the interminable months dragged themselves out, and Cecil lived alone with her husband in the stately solitude of the northern side of Brunswick Square.

The celebrated pea-green Hayne was wont to declare that his horses grew restive when he attempted to take them eastward of Temple Bar; and there are many people nowadays inferior in status to the elegant West-Indian millionaire, who shudder at the mention of Bloomsbury, and affect a serio-comic horror of the unknown latitudes on the northern side of Holborn.

Mr. O'Boyneville had no fashionable aversion to an unfashionable locality. He liked his house in Brunswick Square, because it was big and stoutly built, like himself; and, as the belief that

any thing appertaining to himself must necessarily be the very best thing of its kind in existence was deeply implanted in his tranquil breast, he was serenely unconscious of any brighter region than the comfortable square in which he had taken up his abode when he first found himself able to support a household of his own.

If he had known that there were fairer places than Bloomsbury within reach of the courts of law; if he had fancied that there was any spot in or near London which would have been more pleasant for Cecil, he would have been quick to move his goods and chattels. He loved his wife honestly and truly, and would have made a heavier sacrifice to give her pleasure; but he knew about as much of a woman's tastes and prejudices as he knew of the habitudes and requirements of a white elephant; and he took Lady Cecil calmly home to the dreary, scantily-furnished Bloomsbury mansion, and left her to be happy after her own fashion in the spacious empty rooms while he went back to his work.

While he went back to his work! In those

few words might have been told the dismal history of two lives. The husband went to his work, and gave his heart and soul to breaches of contract and actions for damages, to libel and divorce cases, to actions in debt, trespass, assumpsit, trover, and ejectment; and the wife saw him go out and come in, heard his tired sigh, as he sank half-exhausted into his easy-chair, but remained utterly ignorant and unsympathising.

She had just at first tried to understand her husband's career, and had questioned him upon the subject of his laborious days and studious nights: but when he tried to explain some interesting case—a great will-case—in which the issue of a tedious suit depended on the signification of the words "then" and "forthwith,"—whether the former was meant to specify a particular time, or had reference to some other antecedent time; and whether the latter meant "immediately" or within a convenient time after a certain event,—her mind lost itself among the complications of the law, and she was fain to confess herself mystified rather than enlightened by her husband's explanation.

He kissed her, and told her he would never plague her again with such dry details; and from that hour he very rarely talked of business in his wife's presence.

But he thought of it, and that, for Cecil, was a great deal worse. At breakfast, at dinner, when his young wife was talking to him in her brightest and most animated manner, she would stop suddenly, chilled and discouraged by the discovery that the great barrister had not heard a word of her discourse. After telling him about a new book—a fresh view of Mary Queen of Scots, by a French historian; an anti-Carlyleian essay on Frederick of Prussia; a passionate, classic tragedy, by a new poet—Cecil would look hopefully for some answering ray of interest in her husband's face, and would behold his eyes fixed and staring, and hear his lips murmuring faintly to himself, "the defendant seems to me to have no case, and the plaintiffs will be entitled to recover if Giddles and Giddles can show that the letter was posted on the twenty-first; the defendant must be held in law to be the purchaser, and

therefore responsible for every bale of the cotton. The cases Slattery *v.* Spindleshanks, 30th Law Digest, Q.B., page 102, and Capers *v.* Pepper, in the Weekly Reports, are almost in point—humph! —yes, yes; but old Giddles must be kept out of the witness-box, and Giddles junior pinned to the date and postmark of that letter; and—yes, yes—"

After breakfast Mr. O'Boyneville kissed his wife, and hurried out of the house. At half-past six he came home, washed his hands in a little dressing-room at the back of his study, and sat down to dinner in the dress he had worn all day, with the dust of the law-courts in his hair, and all the dreariness of the law in his brain. Sometimes he talked a little to his wife during dinner, telling her some scrap of public news in which she did not feel the faintest interest, or reciting some legal witticism, which to her uninitiated mind appeared unspeakably stupid. After dinner he read his papers for a quarter of an hour, and then laid himself down upon a gigantic crimson-morocco-covered sofa, which looked like the relic of a de-

parted era, a fossilised mammoth in the way of upholsterer's work, and slept peacefully until nine, when a modest and almost furtive double knock announced the advent of his clerk, who brought the evening's batch of letters and papers.

Then the popular barrister arose like a giant refreshed, took a cup of tea from Cecil's attentive hands, and sipped the revivifying beverage in a dreamy manner, staring thoughtfully at his wife without seeing her, and still revolving the case of Giddles and Giddles, Liverpool brokers, and the three thousand bales of cotton. After tea he went to his study, which darksome sanctorum he rarely left until the smallest of the small hours had sounded from the clocks of St. Pancras and the Foundling.

Laurence O'Boyneville had won his position by honest hard work, and by divine right of an intellect not easily matched amongst the ranks of hard-working man. But such a man is apt to make a terrible mistake when he brings a fair young wife to his joyless home. Incessant work had become the normal state of the barrister. He

did not know that his home was dreary. His life seemed pleasant enough to him; and he did not know that to a woman such a mode of existence must be simply intolerable. He gave his wife a comfortable house, and the unlimited command of money; and he fancied he had done all that was necessary. He had no time for any thing more. When his day's work was finished he was too tired to change his dress, too tired to talk without effort, too tired to go from one room to another after his dinner; and when he had recovered from the fatigue of his day's work his night's work began.

And such a life as this was the realisation of his brightest dream. For these days of unrest and excitement, for these studious nights had the young man from Shannonville toiled and struggled. He had attained a high position in his profession, and he loved his profession. What more could the heart of man desire? Venus Anadyomene divinely smiling amidst a cloud of silvery spray, radiant with vermilion and carmine, ultramarine and Naples yellow, could be no more delightful to the mind of William Crawford, the

painter, than were the cases of Giddles and Giddles *v.* Clithery, Shavington *v.* The Estremadura Soap-boiling Company (limited), and many others to Laurence O'Boyneville, Q.C.

What reason have the painter and the poet, the sculptor and the musician, to be thankful that the arts for which they slave, the labours to which they devote their lives, are beautiful for all the world as well as for the labourers? If Cecil's husband had been a painter she would have been content to stand beside his easel while his bright fancies grew into life upon the canvas. Every new picture would have been an era in her existence as well as in his. No curve of an arm or wrist, no pose of a head, no undulation of a drapery that would not have made subject for pleasant talk and spirited discussion. The painter and his wife may go lovingly hand-in-hand upon the great highway to Fame's starry temple; and if she has been his model now and then, and if she has suggested the subject of a picture, or devised some happy alteration of an attitude, she seems to have had a part in her husband's work.

To all time the wives of Rubens will be associated with his genius; so long as the work of Raffaelle endures, the world will remember the woman he loved and painted.

But what part can the barrister's wife have in his triumphs? Except amongst certain sets the world does not talk much of popular barristers; and the wife of a legal luminary hears little praise of her husband from the lips of strangers. A woman must be strong-minded indeed who can interest herself in the technicalities of a dispute arising out of the purchase of sundry bales of cotton, or the winding-up of the affairs of a bubble company. There is something in the very paraphernalia of the legal profession which, on the threshold, repels all feminine sympathy. The crimson bag, the red tape, the green ferret; the slippery blue paper, which to the unprofessional pen is utterly impracticable for all literary use,—every thing seems alike symbolical of a hopeless dryness and arid barrenness, amidst which no solitary blossom, no lonely, accidental prison-flower can put forth its tender shoots.

As the dull days crept on, so miserably alike one another, Cecil felt it was her duty to be interested in her husband's career. She read the law-reports in the *Times*, the pale shadows of bad puns, whereat there had been laughter, but which could bring no smile to her pensive face. She could not be interested in those dreary lawsuits, those endless disputations about sordid things. So at last she abandoned the effort, and fell back upon her own thoughts, which were sad enough sometimes.

As Lord Aspendell's daughter and as Laurence O'Boyneville's wife, Lady Cecil might have had enough of dinner-parties and evening-parties, kettledrums, and *déjeûners;* but she had grown weary of all parties long before her marriage, and was glad to escape from the set in which she had lived, and to hide herself in the remote fastnesses of Bloomsbury.

"My husband has no time for going out," she said, when her old friends asked her to their houses.

"But you can come, Cecil, and Mr. O'Boyneville can look in during the evening."

Cecil shook her head.

"He is so tired after his day's work that it would be a cruelty to ask him to go out," she said.

"And you are going to lead this dull life always, Cecil?"

"I don't care for society. I was accustomed to a solitary life with poor papa, and it suits me better than any thing else."

But Cecil, looking back upon that old life, remembered with a sigh how dear a companion her father had been. There was nothing in heaven and earth that they had not talked of; no book read by one, and not by the other; no subject so barren that it had not served for pleasant discourse, when the shabby old curtains were drawn, and the lamp lighted in the drawing-room of that dear old tumble-down cottage on the Dyke Road. Cecil did not consider what it was that constituted the grand difference between her father and her husband. She had lived amongst poor people before her marriage, but she had never lived amongst hard-working people. It was very

strange to her to have to do with a person who had no leisure for the refinements and amenities of life; who gave short answers, for lack of time to be deliberate and polite; who told her "not to bother," when she asked some womanly question about his health, or his fatigues, in the midst of professional meditations. A woman has acquired sublime patience when she can meekly endure to be bidden not to "bother" her husband, and still love on.

Never until her marriage had Cecil been familiar with the people who do the work of this world; and it was scarcely strange if her husband, in workday clothes and with his workday manners, seemed to her a being of a different race from that to which belonged the high-bred idlers she had been accustomed to encounter. She knew that he loved her; she knew that he was generous, and good, and true: but this knowledge was not enough. She knew that he was clever; but her lonely days were never brightened by any ray of his intellect, her desolate evenings were never enlivened by his wit. Was he *her* husband? Was

he not rather wedded to that inexorable tyrant which he called his profession? He loved his wife, and was anxious to please her, but not if her pleasure involved the neglect of his professional duties. If Cecil knew that she was beloved, she knew also that Giddles and Giddles and the subtle niceties of the law were nearer and dearer to her husband than she could ever be. It was the name of Giddles, mingled with scraps of an address to the court and jury, that he muttered in his fitful sleep, —it was how to avail himself of the weak points in Clithery's defence, or Shavington's, or Jones and Smith's cases, that he pondered as he brooded by the domestic hearth.

"Why did he marry me?" she thought sometimes, sadly; "I am of no use to him. I am no companion for him. A home for him is only a place in which he can eat and drink and sleep, and keep some of his law-books. If I speak to him at breakfast- or dinner-time, I may disturb a train of thought by some idle word; and when he is asleep on the sofa, how is he the better off for my sitting on the opposite side of the fire yawn-

ing behind my book? The man who comes to him every evening with the red bag is more to him than I am, for the man and the bag belong to his profession."

It is not to be supposed that even so busy a man as Mr. O'Boyneville lived in entire exclusion from all social intercourse with his fellow-men. There were stately dinner-parties to which he conducted his elegant young wife, and on rare occasions he gave a stately dinner at home. And then, once more, Lady Cecil was called upon to give her mind to the *menu* of the feast; only in these latter days there were no harassing calculations of ways and means, no balancing of *fricandeau* against calves' head *en tortue*, no weighing of lobster-cutlets against eels *à la tartare*. All Mr. O'Boyneville's ideas were large and liberal. His household was well organised, his servants few and efficient, his cellar richly furnished; and if the comfortable kitchen-wenches of Bloomsbury are behind the *chefs* and *cordons bleus* of Belgravia, the Bloomsbury confectioner is like "Todgers's," and can do the thing handsomely when he pleases.

But when all was done those rare and solemn entertainments were very dreary to Cecil. She tried to be interested in her husband's friends; but the legal magnates with whom the great O'Boyneville chiefly associated were not interesting to his young wife; and the wives of the legal magnates seemed to have lost all the freshness and brightness of their youth under the all-pervading influence of such cases as Giddles and Giddles *v.* Clithery, and Shavington *v.* The Estremadura Soap-boiling Company (limited).

If Mr. O'Boyneville could have purchased his wife pleasure at any cost save that of his legal position, he would gladly have done so. He saw a pile of Cecil's music-books heaped on a side-table in the bare, bleak drawing-rooms, and half an hour afterwards bade his clerk convey to Messrs. Broadwood his desire that one of the finest grand pianos that firm could supply should be delivered without delay in Brunswick Square. Cecil felt a kind of rapture as she ran her fingers over the new keys, and heard the silvery tones of that perfect instrument; for the dowager's cottage, on

which she had been wont to perform, in Dorset Square, gave forth only feeble tinklings for its treble, and woolly confusion for its bass. After the pleasant surprise occasioned by the arrival of the splendid grand, after a happy day spent in desultory ramblings amongst old music-books, Cecil tripped lightly down to the hall when the banging of doors announced the arrival of her husband's hansom-cab, eager to bid him welcome.

She met him, and went with him into the dressing-room, where he was wont to make his brief toilet.

"I want to thank you a thousand, thousand times!" she said.

"Thank me, my dear! What for?" asked the barrister, washing his hands.

"The piano—the beautiful Broadwood!"

"What piano?"

The great O'Boyneville's mind was either with Giddles *v.* Clithery or the Spanish Soap-boiling Company. Cecil sighed. It seemed as if half the value of the gift was taken away by the indifference of the giver.

"I thank you very, very much," she said presently, but all the girlish animation had gone from her manner. "There is nothing in the world you could have given me so welcome as that delightful piano."

"I'm very glad you like it, dear; I told them to send you a good one. I caught sight of your music-books on the table in the drawing-room through the open door as I came down to breakfast yesterday morning, and I remembered that music-books couldn't be of any use to you without a piano."

After this Cecil tried to make herself happy in her husband's house. She tried to reconcile herself to his long absences, his gloomy preoccupation, his profound slumbers on the mammoth sofa. She tried to be in all things a good and dutiful wife, and to lead her own life peacefully and happily, thanking Providence for having given her so kind a protector, so honest a friend, in the person of the husband who could never be her companion. She arranged her favourite books in a little old-fashioned bookcase in the back

drawing-room; she decorated the two gaunt rooms with birds and flowers, and scattered pretty inexpensive nicnacks on the ponderous rosewood tables. Whatever elegance can be imparted to two great dreary apartments, furnished by general order on an upholsterer with all that is most solid in carved rosewood, and all that is most darksome in green damask, Lady Cecil imparted to the Bloomsbury drawing-rooms. But when all was done they were too large for her loneliness, and the days and nights seemed very long in them. She had piles of new books from a mighty emporium in the neighbourhood, and she read herself almost blind sometimes before the day was done. She had a neat little brougham in which to pay visits or drive in the Park, but she did not care to retain fashionable acquaintances whose ways were no longer her ways. The delights for which she pined were not the frivolous joys of Belgravian drawing-rooms, nor the glare and glitter of Tyburnian festivals. When her fancies wandered away from the Bloomsbury realities into the world of visions, they carried her to fair

cities in distant lands, to sombre German forests and snow-clad Swiss mountains, towering upward in an atmosphere whose breath is like the breath of a new life revivifying a worn-out body. She thought how peaceful, how very nearly happy, the quiet autumn days spent in Devonshire with her husband had seemed to her.

Mr. O'Boyneville was not a man to do things by halves, and when he divorced himself from business the separation was always a complete one. During the brief honeymoon he had been the most devoted and submissive of husbands, the tenderest of friends, the most sympathetic of companions; but once within a shilling cab-fare of the law-courts, the husband and the lover froze into the man of business, and Giddles *v.* Clithery, or Jones *v.* Robinson, or Smith against Brown and others, reigned paramount.

Mrs. MacClaverhouse honoured her niece by dining with her now and then, and was received with stately ceremony, and treated with all courteous attention by her nephew-in-law, for whom she seemed to entertain a profound esteem. The

dowager was pleased to express her approval of Mr. O'Boyneville's wines, and her commendation of her niece's cook, "though she robs you, my dear, I have no doubt, up hill and down dale," said the experienced housekeeper; "those good cooks always do. And that husband of yours is such a generous creature, that I think he must have been created to be robbed. I do hope you keep some check upon the housekeeping, and go down to the kitchen at least *once* a-day. I know it requires moral courage to do it, just at first; but a woman who has no moral courage is not fit to have a house of her own, or to live in lodgings either; for, long as my experience has been, I'm not able to say whether a cook's or a landlady's audacity goes furthest in such matters as lard and gravy-beef, while the amount of port and sherry such women will make away with, under pretence of hare-soup and cabinet-puddings, is something awful."

But though the dowager had every reason to be satisfied with her reception whenever she visited Brunswick Square, she did not care to go

there often, for her lively spirit revolted against the dulness of Mr. O'Boyneville's mansion.

"I don't know how it is, Cecil," she exclaimed one day, "but from the first moment I entered your dining-room its effect upon me has been equally depressing. There's a something. I don't know whether it's the dark-brown curtains or that dreadful mahogany cellaret—and, O, why do they make cellarets like sarcophaguses?—under that gigantic sideboard; but there is a something in your house that preys upon my spirits. Of course it needn't have that effect upon you, my dear, for you're accustomed to it, and habit always attaches one to things; but I'm a whimsical old woman, and this end of the town always did depress me; while if you take me up towards Islington, past all those cheap photographers and dusty little gardens, you take me to despair."

Miss Crawford was a frequent visitor at her old friend's house, though Cecil did not encourage her visits, as her coming very often involved the escort of Mr. Lobyer, who worried the birds stealthily while the two ladies were engaged in

conversation, and who was generally accompanied by a diminutive terrier, or a fawn-coloured pug of unamiable disposition. Even when Florence Crawford came alone, her presence was not altogether welcome to Cecil. She was oppressively lively, and seemed to grow more and more volatile as the time appointed for her marriage with the young millionaire grew nearer. She talked of nothing but carriages and horses, Tyburnian mansions, and county splendours; and she was never weary of upbraiding Cecil upon the folly of her residence in Brunswick Square.

"If I were you I wouldn't allow my husband an hour's peace till he removed to the West-end," she said; "I hear he earns heaps of money, and it's really shameful of him to keep you here."

"My dear Florence, if I were to ask Mr. O'Boyneville to take a house at the West-end, I'm sure he would do so immediately."

"Then why in goodness' name don't you ask him?"

"Because he would be so ready to grant my

request, and I don't wish to impose upon his kindness."

"Impose upon his fiddlesticks! Really, Cecil, you provoke me into being vulgar: and I wonder how it is, by the by, that all great emotions have a tendency to make one vulgar. I shall lose all common patience if you insist upon talking like the good young woman in a novel. What did you marry Mr. O'Boyneville for unless it was for a handsome house and a fashionable carriage?"

"I married him because I loved him," Cecil answered gravely, "and because I hoped to make him a good wife."

Flo's piquant eyebrows elevated themselves to their utmost extent as her friend said this.

"O!" she exclaimed, "of course that alters the case: but you really *are* like the young woman in a novel, Cecil; and I could never quite bring myself to believe in that young woman."

And then the impulsive Florence pounced upon her friend, and embraced her with effusion, declaring that she loved her dearest Cecil to distraction, and that she would not for worlds say

any thing to wound or distress her. "I'm such a mercenary wretch myself, dear," she said, "that I fancy every body must be made of the same contemptible stuff. The girls I meet are so like me, and all our ideas seem to run in the same groove. Do you know, Cecil, I sometimes think that if we are unbelieving and mercenary—if we worship nothing but the pomps and vanities of society—our wickedness is only the natural effect of the precepts instilled into the youthful mind by those dreadful grandmothers and maiden aunts of the old school, who were always preaching against all that is romantic and poetical, and whose dearest delight was to bray their children's brains in the stony mortar of common-sense."

Once, and once only, did Cecil venture to speak earnestly to Florence Crawford on the subject of her approaching marriage. All those vague allusions to the mercenary sentiments of modern damsels, which Miss Crawford was so fond of uttering, seemed to Cecil like so many excuses for her union with the rich young Manchester man. She had not the heart to ask direct

questions, but she spoke very seriously—as she would have spoken to a sister.

"Remember the long, long life, dear," she said earnestly,—"the long years that are to come after the wedding-day. Women never could talk so lightly of marriage if they had any thought of the future. Think, Florence dear, it is a union that can only be broken by death—or shame and misery ten times worse than death. I can only repeat the stalest truisms: these things have been said a hundred times before to-day far better than I can say them; and yet day after day, year after year, there are wedding-favours worn, and wedding-bells rung, in honour of marriages that are only the beginning of life-long misery."

"Cecil," cried Flo impatiently, "if you talk like that I shall begin to think you repent having married Mr. O'Boyneville."

"No, no, dear, I don't repent; but I know now that I did not think seriously enough of the step I was taking."

Miss Crawford had been beating the point of her pretty little boot upon the floor, and twisting

the fringe of her elegant parasol into all manner of knots and entanglements during Cecil's lecture. The piquant eyebrows were contracted into a frown, and the pretty gray eyes were filled with tears, and it was not easy to discover whether anger or sorrow were the stronger in the breast of Florence Crawford.

"I don't think I should have accepted Thomas," she said presently—and she had not yet brought herself to pronounce her lover's Christian name without making a wry face—"in fact, I'm sure I shouldn't have accepted him if I had known what being engaged would bring upon me. Every creature upon earth seems to make it his or her business to lecture me. People talk about hasty marriages and life-long misery just as if they had some occult power of knowing that Mr. Lobyer was predoomed to half murder me with a poker, like the men one reads of at the police-courts, within a week of our marriage. And yet what did I see before I was engaged? Every girl I knew eager to please the man I am going to marry, and every mother trying to beguile him

into marrying her daughter. But now every thing is changed. People shake their heads when they talk of Mr. Lobyer, and my particular friends sigh and groan about my prospects as dismally as if I had set my heart upon marrying a chimney-sweep. If I was going to be sacrificed upon an altar to-morrow, like that young woman in Racine's tragedy, people couldn't go on about me worse than they do. Of course I don't pretend to say that I am romantically attached to Mr. Lobyer —first and foremost because I don't believe there are any romantic attachments in these days; and secondly, because if there are, I'm not at all the sort of person to be the subject of one."

And then, after a little pause, Miss Crawford would continue the discussion.

"I like him very well, I'm sure," she said rather thoughtfully, and somewhat as if she had not quite decided the question in her own mind, "and I don't care a straw for any one else; and I daresay I shall behave pretty well to him, though I fear it's not in my nature to behave too well to any one. So, on the whole, I really can't see that

people have any right to lecture me about the unfortunate young man I'm going to marry."

After this tirade the impetuous Florence again embraced her friend, and declared herself for the twentieth time to be a frivolous mercenary creature, unworthy alike of love and friendship. But henceforward Cecil felt that it was useless to interfere with Miss Crawford's arrangements. If sorrow lay before the painter's daughter on the road that she was treading, she was too obstinately bent on going her own way to be drawn back by any friendly hand, let it hold her never so gently.

Mr. Lobyer dined in Brunswick Square one evening to meet his betrothed; on which occasion the barrister subjected him to rather a severe cross-examination. Cecil ventured next morning to ask her husband what he thought of her friend's suitor.

"It's rather fortunate for your friend and for the gentleman himself that he was born rich," answered Mr. O'Boyneville; "there are some men who seem created to distinguish themselves at the

Old Bailey, and I'm afraid Mr. Lobyer is one of them. But as he is the owner of a million or two, it doesn't much matter. If he had been a poor man, he would have run through all the crimes in the statute-book; but as he has unlimited wealth, he can indulge himself by breaking four-fifths of the ten commandments without putting himself in the power of the law."

CHAPTER VI.

POOR PHILIP.

THERE were other men besides Laurence O'Boyneville who found it pleasant to pitch their tents and kindle their household fires within the limits of Bloomsbury. Sigismund Smythe, the novelist, believed in the neighbourhood of Russell Square as the most delightful spot on earth.

"I had an over-dose of the country when I was young, and I'm not given to babble of green fields and pastures new," said Mr. Smythe, whose quotations were apt to be more appropriate than correct. "People may talk as they like about the dulness of Rachel Street, and Sidney Crescent. I only wish they'd had a taste of the High Street of my native town on a hot summer's evening between eight and nine o'clock. That would cure them. Dull, quotha! haven't we the cabs and the

tradesmen's carts, and the great vans from King's-Cross Station, and coals always being delivered at one's next-door neighbour's. In my native town there wasn't a tradesman kept any conveyance above a wheelbarrow; and as to cabs, there was only one dilapidated old fly in the place. O, I should like the people who turn up their noses at Bloomsbury to try Wareham, when the towns-people have gone to a cricket-match in the Castle Meads, and when the only thing alive in the High Street is one solitary cat stalking upon the tops of the houses. Dull, indeed! why, on such a summer evening as I'm thinking of, I've heard a man yawn three doors off, and I'm sure a hearty sneeze would have startled the whole town."

Mr. Smythe had taken to himself a pretty country-bred young wife, the orphan niece of his old friend Charles Raymond, with whom he lived in perfect harmony, and who never read a line of his novels. This was a point upon which the novelist insisted.

"If you read my books you'll make suggestions, and if you make suggestions I shall hate

you, and the better your suggestions are the more I shall hate you," said Sigismund. "Nor do I care about your knowing the depths of infamy which the human mind, for an adequate consideration, can fathom. The critics inform me that my fictions are demoralising. As a writer and a ratepayer I believe in my fictions; but as a husband I defer to the critics, and forbid my wife to read my novels."

Sigismund's house was comfortably furnished; and in no habitation within sound of the bells of St. Pancras were to be seen so many nick-nacks, such quaint old black-oak bookcases and cabinets, such wonderful morsels of majolica and Palissy, such Liliputian silver tea-services and watering-pots and coal-scuttles, such marvels in the art of photography, such delicious bookbinding in white vellum and many-coloured calf, as in the dwelling of the romancer. Mr. Smythe possessed that love of colour and brightness, that childlike yearning for prettiness, which seems the attribute of most men who live by the cultivation of their fancy. To keep these household gods in order was Mrs

Smythe's chief occupation and delight; and to her mind the little inner room lined with books, and furnished with a wonderful office-table on which there were inexhaustible bundles of quill-pens and innumerable reams of smooth shining foreign note-paper, was the most sacred chamber ever tenanted by mortal man. For in this apartment did the industrious Sigismund compose his romances, beguiled by the yelping and howling of his favourite dog, who inhabited an open stone-vault below the novelist's windows,—a vault which the boldest of house-agents faltered in designating a back-garden.

Perhaps there was no pleasanter house within a mile radius of Russell Square than the modest dwelling inhabited by Mr. and Mrs. Smythe. Here, when the moderator-lamp was lighted and the curtains drawn, some of the brightest luminaries of modern literature assembled round the hospitable hearth. Here were always to be found dry sherry and unlimited soda-water, the palest brandy and the most genuine Seltzer and Vichy. Here little wicker-covered bottles of liqueur, and

cherry cordials that had come straight from Copenhagen by convoy of friendly hands, were found lurking in corners of sideboards. Here better things were said than ever found their way to the compositor. Here the mighty chief of the "Bond-Street Blagueur" laid aside the murderous pen of the critic and expanded in genial friendship—that delicious friendship of the *coterie*, which is another name for enmity to all the rest of the world. And here poor Philip Foley came to seek consolation—or at least friendly listeners into whose ears he could pour the unsuccessful man's bitter railing—when the British Institution and the Academy had been unanimous in rejecting his pictures, and when the Sunday evenings at the Fountains had been particularly dispiriting. Of late Mr. Foley had abandoned himself to a sullen despair — the outward and visible tokens whereof were to be observed in the length of his hair and the carelessness of his attire. He had taken to immoderate tobacco, and laughed a strident laugh at the caustic witticisms of the "Bond-Street" chief. He had grown fitful in his habits,

and would sometimes drink himself into an intellectual frenzy with innumerable tumblers of brandy and Seltzer, while on other occasions he would sit apart glowering moodily on the company, and refusing to taste any thing stronger than water.

Sigismund was very good to this stricken deer. Sometimes, when Philip had taken a homely dinner with Mr. and Mrs. Smythe, and when the novelist had been working hard all day, the two young men paced the streets and squares of the Bloomsbury district together in gloaming and gaslight, and discoursed with brotherly confidence and freedom.

"I tell you she isn't worth the howling you make about her—*le jeu ne vaut pas*—the what's-its-name," said the practical Sigismund. "What is she but a little fair-haired chit, with dark eyebrows and big gray eyes, and the insolent turned-up nose of a Palais-Royal *soubrette?* What is she but a mercenary little adventuress? Yes, though she lives under her father's roof, and shelters her innocence under the wing of a chaperone when she ventures abroad, the woman who angles for a

rich husband is no better than an adventuress, whatever and whoever she may be. And you let yourself run to seed, and neglect your work, and take to cynical declamation against things in general, when you have good reason to be thankful for a blessed escape from misery. Do you think such a wife as William Crawford's daughter could fail to make you wretched? Why, she would spend your annual earnings on her gloves; and the day that brought you back your unhung pictures from the Academy would in all probability bring you a county-court summons from your wife's milliner. No, no, Phil; the lovely Florence would have been no wife for you, and she has shown herself wise in her generation. You want a dear homely little creature—say an orphan, —there's an extraordinary advantage in marrying an orphan,—a poor desolate young thing who has spent her girlhood as half-boarder, or governess-pupil, in a cheap boarding-school, and who will think Islington a paradise, and esteem herself fortunate if she gets a new gown once a year, and a clean bonnet-cap at Christmas and Easter. That's

the only kind of wife for a rising man—the dear good uncomplaining helpmate, who will devote all the strength of her intellect to make both ends meet, and will, while sitting by your side in the parlour, have an instinctive consciousness that the maid-of-all-work is burning a tallow-candle to waste in the back-kitchen,—the model housewife of the Dutch painters, who goes down to her kitchen with a candle in the dead of night, to prevent waste and riot. You want a dear little girl with a genius for mending and contriving, who will sit by your fireside darning your socks, and singing 'Wapping old stairs' or 'The last rose of summer' while you work at your easel, and who will believe in you, in spite of the world, as the greatest genius that ever handled a brush. In point of fact, you want such a wife as my wife!" exclaimed Sigismund triumphantly. "And as for Florence Crawford, let her make merry or go hang herself, as the bard observes. Good gracious me!" cried the romancer, suddenly bursting into song:

"'Should I, wasting in despai-air,
Die-ie becau-ause a woman's fai-air?'

By which, of course, I mean shall *you*," he added,

in explanation. "Besides, haven't you your art to fall back upon? If life goes wrong with you, can't you take it out in violent reds and yellows, as I take it out in murder and villany? When the critics fall foul of me, I buy an extra ream of paper and a gallon of ink, and go at my work with a will. All the world lies before you, dear old Phil; and the day may come when Mrs. Lobyer will be obliged to expend her shilling for a peep at your great picture reigning in solitary glory in some West-end gallery; which isn't by any means a new dodge by the by, for didn't the Athenians pay an entrance-fee for seeing the 'Helen' which Zeuxis painted for their city?"

Thus consoled by the voice of friendship, Mr. Foley only grew more bitter. But he took his friend's advice nevertheless. Expended his last ten-pound note in the purchase of a new easel, and set up a monster canvas. He was almost like poor Haydon, who, in the piteous record of his wasted life, declares that without "a new large picture to lean upon," he felt "as if deserted by the world."

In all the course of his acquaintance with William Crawford's fascinating daughter, the young painter had made no direct avowal of his passion. He loved her—he had told her so, indirectly, a thousand times—and he knew that she was conscious of his devotion.

For some time after hearing Florence Crawford's engagement discussed as an established fact, Mr. Foley kept aloof from the Sunday-evening gatherings at the Fountains. Ah, how he hated the dreary Sabbath twilights after he had forsworn the delight of Flo's society; the wind and dust upon the Islington highways; the smartly-dressed church-goers decorously moving homewards; the smarter servant-maids hurrying away from hot little chapels, where they had been enduring semi-suffocation in the glare of the gas! Those bright, windy, spring evenings were terrible to the struggling painter. The decorous Islingtonians stared at him wonderingly as he passed them by, with his haggard face and streaming hair, his meerschaum-pipe and paint-stained coat. He lit his pipe when he was clear of the crowd,

and with that faithful companion walked the suburban highways till midnight. On such evenings the atmosphere of his painting-room stifled him; the prim little sitting-room, in which his landlord's family kept their sabbath state, was odious to him.

"I feel as if I couldn't breathe on those wretched Sunday nights," said Philip to his faithful Sigismund. "It is all very well while I can see to paint—for I have grown a heathen since—since—*she* threw me over—and I stick to my easel on Sundays as well as week-days; but when the light goes my pluck goes with it. I light my pipe, but the tobacco chokes me. I fold my arms upon the window-sill, and try to think out some difficulty in the composition of my picture; but it's no use. I find myself thinking of *her*, and wondering whether she is arraying herself in one of those gauzy white muslins, with floating turquoise-coloured ribbons, in which she looks the incarnation of freshness and innocence. And then I light my lamp and open my box of water-colours, and make a little sketch of her in the cloudy muslin,

and the sky-blue ribbons, with sunshine upon her hair, and sunshine upon her dress, and the tenderest shadows hovering about and around her. Ah, Sigismund, if you are ever desperately in love, thank Providence that you can't paint. That's a fatal power. To conjure out of a few paltry pigments the beloved face in all its dangerous beauty, instinct with looks of love that never will illumine it for you; to be for ever calling into life and brightness the same lovely shadow, and to know that it is only a beautiful phantasm; to kiss the lips that are nothing but a patch of colour wet from your own brush; to pore upon eyes that owe their sole light to artful touches of the pencil,—ah, dear friend, *that* way madness lies! If St. Anthony had been as good a draughtsman as William Crawford, he wouldn't have been *Saint* Anthony; for he could never have rid himself of the sirens. When I have finished my sketch, and have admired it, and have got into a passion with it, and have torn it into a hundred fragments, I put on my hat and go out. But even out of doors the atmosphere seems close and

stifling, and I can scarcely breathe till I get beyond Holloway, to the crown of Highgate Hill; and then I stand on the bridge and look down upon London, and think what a vast Babylon it is, and how many girls there are within its boundaries ready like Florence Crawford to sell themselves to the highest bidder—slaves who only lack the badge of slavery. I shall go to Switzerland in the autumn, Sigismund, and paint from nature, and try if I can't walk down my disappointments amongst the mountains."

As the time when Miss Crawford was likely to become Mrs. Lobyer drew nearer, poor Philip found his sabbath evenings more difficult of endurance.

That passionate yearning to see the adored object once more—for the last, last time—to which all despairing lovers are liable, took complete possession of the young painter. For three consecutive Sundays he fought against the temptation, calling up his pride to assist him in the struggle. But pride is very weak when bidden to do battle with love. On the third occasion Mr.

Foley snatched up his hat, hurried to a barber in a poor neighbourhood, in which a barber's business was at its best on a Sunday, and sacrificed the luxuriance of his hair and beard to the man's inartistic scissors. Then, after a walk, in which he fought the tempter for the last time, changing his mind every five minutes, the painter went back to his lodgings and made a careful toilet. There was a feverish kind of pleasure in what he was doing — the desperate sense of delight which a despairing wretch is apt to feel when his woes have come to a climax, and he is about to snatch the one chance of a fleeting joy that remains to him amidst his misery.

It was a balmy evening in May, and the stars were shining in a tender blue sky, when Philip descended from the heights of Islington. He had sold no picture for the last six months, and had exhausted the quarterly instalment of his modest income, so he was fain to make his way on foot along the interminable New Road and across the Park to Kensington. He brushed the dust from his boots with his cambric handkerchief as he stood

before Mr. Crawford's gates, and while doing so, he had the pleasure of beholding the arrival of a pair of high-stepping cobs, and the smallest of miniature broughams, furnished with the biggest and most ferociously flaming of lamps, whose demoniac glare might have been easily dispensed with under the silvery spring starlight. A contemptuous groom with a tight waist descended from the box of this vehicle and opened the door with a bang, thereby releasing Mr. Lobyer, who emerged something after the fashion of a badly-fitting jack-in-the-box, and who looked a great deal too big and clumsy for his brougham. The two men looked at each other as they passed through the gateway together, pretending not to know each other, and with an unquenchable hatred visible in the faces which they fondly imagined expressed nothing but a contemptuous indifference.

The rich man was free of the place, and contrived to push his way to the drawing-room before Philip; and the young painter, following close upon his heels, had the opportunity of beholding

Miss Crawford's coquettishly disdainful welcome of her affianced suitor.

Poor Philip saw her face grow pale as she looked across her lover's shoulder and recognised her old admirer; but the colour came back to the delicate cheeks very quickly, and she gave Philip her hand with her airiest manner.

"Where have you been hiding yourself all this season, Mr. Foley?" she exclaimed. "We never see you now. I hope you are devoting yourself to some great picture that is to astonish us all. Do tell me what you have been doing in all these ages."

Miss Crawford drew her airy dress away from one side of the capacious triangular ottoman, which had been almost hidden under her voluminous draperies, and Philip seated himself in the vacant place. Yes, there are decidedly some joys left even for the desperate man, and Philip experienced a keen sense of delight in defying Mr. Lobyer.

That gentleman stood beside his betrothed, looking down upon her with an expression which might have in some degree justified the dismal forebodings of the people who foresaw only melan-

choly results from Miss Crawford's brilliant match. But Flo was not a person to be alarmed by the scowls of a jealous swain, scowl he never so savagely. She looked up at Mr. Lobyer with her sweetest smile, and murmured gently:

"Surely, Thomas, you know Mr. Foley? you must have met him here again and again."

The two men uttered unintelligible growls without looking at each other, and Florence continued her conversation with her unhappy admirer.

"I hope you have been working very hard," she said, "and painting from nature. Papa is always talking about the necessity of painting from nature. Have you been abroad, or in Scotland, or Wales? Pray let us hear what you have been doing."

"Very little so far, Miss Crawford," answered the landscape-painter gravely, "but I am beginning to work in savage earnest. 'Men must work, and women must weep.' I think that's what Mr. Kingsley says. Heaven knows the men work hard enough nowadays, but I fancy the race of women who weep has passed away."

Miss Crawford looked at her victim with the most charming expression of bewilderment; and then after a brief pause she said sweetly:

"I looked for something of yours at the British Institution and the Academy, and was so disappointed to find nothing. How did it happen?"

"My pictures were rejected. It is my destiny to be rejected," said Philip, with tragical intensity.

Mr. Lobyer at this moment gave utterance to a suppressed growl, and might possibly have testified his indignation by some overt act of discourtesy towards Philip, if a little deputation had not approached the ottoman to entreat a song from Miss Crawford. That young lady, rising promptly to comply with the desire of her friends, left her two lovers scowling at each other.

A young German, of a musical turn of mind, conducted Flo to the piano, and made himself busy in arranging the music and placing the candles. Mr. Lobyer, glaring at this gentleman, and addressing Philip Foley under cover of this gentleman, gave utterance to his sentiments.

"I should have thought when a fellow was

engaged to be married to a girl, other fellows would have sense enough to know that the girl doesn't want their attentions," said the amiable Thomas; and then he stalked to the piano, and stood behind his liege lady, staring moodily at the parting of her hair as she played and sang. Mr. Lobyer was not an enthusiast in the musical art, nor indeed in the pictorial, nor in any art which demands the possession of refined tastes in the man who loves it.

Philip held himself aloof from the group around the piano. He heard Flo's clear soprano voice ring out the airiest of ballads, all about Switzerland and "chamois bounding free," and mountain maids, who sing Tra-la-la-la from morn till dewy eve. He heard her, and fancied that such silvery notes could only belong to a singer unencumbered with any thing in the way of a heart.

"She could never sing like that if she had a spark of real feeling," he thought. "How charming she was just now! how sweetly she smiled at me! how graciously she invited me to sit by her side! And yet she has no more con-

sciousness of my suffering than if she were a mermaid. She is going to marry a rich man, and she is so pleased with her good fortune that she is ready to be amiable to all the world. But for pity, or compunction, or womanly tenderness—bah! she does not know what such things mean."

The young painter turned his back upon the crowd—the fashionable people who came to the Fountains because they wanted to see what William Crawford was like, and the artists and professional people, who came because they liked him—poor Philip turned his back upon society, and went into a little inner room where there were stands of engravings and photographs, and where flirtations were often carried on pleasantly under cover of art. The little room happened to be empty just now, and Philip threw himself into a chair by the open window, and abandoned himself to melancholy meditation. Mr. Crawford's garden looked very pretty in the starlight. There were trees that had been growing there for centuries,—a noble old cedar, which had sheltered the powdered beaux and belles of the Hanoverian

dynasty, under which Harley or Bolingbroke may have paced with meditative steps; a tree that had flourished in the days of the court suburb's grandest glory, and which flourished still for the delight of William Crawford the painter, who had given something like a guinea an inch for his old-fashioned garden.

Philip had been sitting alone for some time; he had been so long undisturbed that he had forgotten the nature of the place he was in, and the meaning of that gentle buzzing and humming of voices in the adjoining apartment. So profound were the young man's meditations, that the sound of footsteps close behind him did not break the spell of his reverie. It was only when a friendly hand was laid upon his shoulder that he looked up and saw his host standing by his side.

"Florence told me you were here, but I couldn't find you till this moment," said the great painter, giving his cordial hand to the moody struggler. "What have you been doing with yourself all these months? I wanted your help for the background of my Jupiter; but perhaps

you are growing too big a man to paint backgrounds."

"Not too big a man, Mr. Crawford, but too proud a man. I think the unsuccessful men are always the proudest. Failure is like poverty, it sets a man against his fortunate fellow-creatures. I've been painting seven years; and though I've worked fitfully, I've not been idle. If I don't do any thing to make my name known amongst painters in the next three years, I'll make a bonfire of my easel and all the rubbish of my studio, and take to my father's trade."

"What was that?"

"He was a lieutenant in the 82d Foot, and died of cholera on a forced march in the hottest month of the East-Indian summer. There was a fuss made at the Home Office about that march, and it turned out to have been one of those official blunders by which lives are so often wasted. I daresay my father had rather a hard time of it altogether in his brief military career, but his life wasn't *all* disappointment and failure. He didn't know what it was to give his heart and soul to

the work he loved—to think of it by day and to dream of it by night, until he woke from his bright dreams to find it all so much wasted labour. He never knew that."

"No, Philip," answered William Crawford gravely, "but I have known that; and you know as well as I do that I have gone through the struggles, and endured the disappointments, that seem so hard to you now. Do you remember that mystical story of Bulwer Lytton's, in which the student, who would fain have made himself master of a mighty science, was arrested at the outset by a hideous spectre that haunted the threshold of the shadowy temple? At the portal of every temple you will meet the same forbidding spirit. I have faced the Dweller on the Threshold, Philip, and have wrestled with and vanquished him. For me he has borne the shape of toil and poverty, failure and humiliation. He has dressed himself in the clothes of the hanging-committee, and has rejected my pictures; he has made himself an art-critic, and has demolished me in a malevolent criticism. In every form I

have encountered him, and have mastered him—only because I loved my art better than I loved myself, and worshipped my art as something apart from myself. There was some method in poor Haydon's madness when he said, 'In me the solitary sublimity of high art is not gone.' With an execution in his house, and a cook dunning him for her wages, the poor enthusiast was able to rejoice that there was one person left in the world to paint big classic unsaleable pictures. I believe that poor fellow was a real artist. There are men who paint great pictures who are not true artists; and there are true artists who never paint great pictures. Your ideal artist is above envy and above despair. Haydon committed suicide because he couldn't pay his butcher and baker, not because his big canvases were unsuccessful. He would have gone on painting, and hoping against hope, if he could have afforded to live: it was the sordid every-day necessity that vanquished him. You will never be a great painter, Foley, while you think of your own disappointments, your own failures: you must learn to merge your

identity into the mighty abstraction. If they refuse your picture at the Academy to-day, go home and begin a better to-morrow; and before the month is out you will rejoice that your rejected canvas was unhung. The story of Lot's wife has a moral for painters. Never look back. What are the failures of the past and the present? A little wasted canvas, a few tubes of colour more or less; and it is across the failures of the present that brave men march to the triumphs of the future. What hot-headed fellows the young men of the present day are! I was five-and-thirty before I got a decent price for a picture; and here is a lad of twenty-seven talking of going out to India to die, because he is not acknowledged as the new Turner."

William Crawford had been the kindly friend and adviser of many young painters; but it was not often that he spoke as earnestly as he had spoken to Philip Foley to-night. The young man grasped his counsellor's hand with feverish ardour.

"You are right," he said. "I am a weak,

egotistical fool; and it is of myself I am always thinking, and not of my art. A painter ought to divorce himself from the common weaknesses and to wean himself from the common pleasures of mankind; and yet Rubens was happy with his beautiful young wives, and had his home as well as his painting-room. I gathered some ivy-leaves in his garden last autumn, and, standing in the little pavilion where he used to sit sketching on summer mornings, I thought what a blessed existence it must have been, the sweet home-life in that quaint old city of Antwerp. But it is not in every man to be Rubens, nor is it in every man to win the woman he loves; and—you are right, Mr. Crawford. The painter who wants to be great must forget himself and his own troubles. I daresay there were family jars even in the Antwerp household, and that glorious Peter Paul has gone to his work with a sore heart on some of those bright summer mornings."

There was a pause, during which both men stood looking out at the starlit garden, thinking of the women they loved. Mrs. Champernowne had

promised to "look in" at the Fountains on that special Sunday evening, and had not done so.

"It was like her to delude me by a promise, on purpose to disappoint me by breaking it," thought Mr. Crawford bitterly.

"Come, Foley," he said at last, "let's hear what you have been doing. I hope you are working honestly."

"I am working honestly just now; but I have wasted more of my life lately than I can afford to waste, and I have only just awakened to the sense of my folly."

"Then you are lucky," answered William Crawford. "The man who awakes to a sense of his folly at twenty-seven is a happy fellow. There are some of us who are fools for the best part of our lives. But answer my question plainly: What are you doing now?"

"Mountain-scenery—an evening-storm."

"And you paint your mountain-storm at Islington, with no better light than you get across London chimney-pots! That is not the way Collins painted. You must go straight to nature, my

dear boy, and paint your storm amongst the mountains."

"A man whose pictures won't sell, and who has only a hundred a-year to fall back upon, can't afford to go to nature. I did think of spending the summer on the Yorkshire coast, roughing it among fishermen and coast-guardsmen; but I have outrun the constable, and must stop in my Islington lodging and paint 'pot-boilers.' I can't afford to travel this year."

"Yes, you can, Philip, if I lend you a couple of hundred pounds."

"You, Mr. Crawford?"

"Who can better afford to do so than I, who know your power to do great things in the future? However, on reflection, I won't lend you the money. Borrowed money is supposed to exercise a demoralising influence on the artistic mind. I'll give you a commission, and pay you in advance. There's a little bit of scenery on the Danube that I fell in love with a few years ago. I'll find you the description of the spot in Murray, and I'll write you a cheque for the two hundred before

you leave the house to-night. Spend your summer and autumn on the Rhine and Danube, and bring me back my pet spot on a small canvas."

"But—but this is too generous," stammered the landscape-painter.

"There is not a spark of generosity involved in the transaction. If I were a Manchester man you would take my commission without thanks or parley. But since you insist upon treating the matter as a favour, I will attach a condition to my offer."

"And that is—"

"That you leave England at once. These long May-days are too good to waste in lodgings at Islington."

"I think I know why you do me this great kindness," said Philip.

"First and foremost, because I believe in your genius."

"Secondly, because you don't wish me to come to this house just now. I understand the delicacy of your kindness. I appreciate your goodness, and—"

"And you accept my commission—"

"As heartily as it is given. I shall start for Rotterdam by the next steamer; and when I come back—"

"You will bring home a picture which the Academy will not reject. I may be on the hanging-committee myself next year, in which case I promise you your landscape shall not be skied. Be sure there's human interest in your picture, by the by. You paint the figure better than any landscape-painter I know; and mind you make good use of your power. That barefooted girl with the pitcher would not have crossed the brook so often if your crack landscape-painters didn't know the value of human interest. Let us have something fresher and stronger than the barefooted girl for Trafalgar Square next May."

There was a walnut-wood davenport in the room, before which the painter seated himself. He took a cheque-book from one of the drawers, and wrote his cheque while he talked to Philip.

"If you take that to my bankers they'll give you circular notes," he said; "and now good-

night and good-bye. Start by the next boat, work your hardest, and look forward to next May. I mean you to be a great man."

For the second time Philip grasped the great painter's hand, and that hearty pressure of palm to palm was the only expression which he gave to his gratitude. Nor did William Crawford give him any opportunity for grateful protestations. Before the young man had put the cheque into his pocket, his benefactor had returned to the drawing-room, where his guests were perpetually being surprised, and delighted, and unspeakably obliged by instrumental and vocal performances, during the progress of which they had appeared agreeably occupied by animated conversation.

After putting the painter's cheque into his pocket, Philip went out into the garden, and paced slowly up and down a broad gravel-walk that led away from the house, and was overshadowed by trellis-work and creeping-plants. He wanted to linger just for a few minutes within the precincts of his paradise before he turned his back upon it for ever.

"When I come back here *she* will be married to that cub, and the mistress of some fine brand-new house in South Kensington or Tyburnia. And I can remember her walking by my side in this shaded alley, looking up in my face with grave earnest eyes, and pretending to be interested in my art. As if *she* cared for art, or for any thing upon this earth except fine dresses and diamonds, and a three-hundred-guinea barouche in which to display herself when she drives in the Park. If I painted a good picture, and made a success, would she be sorry then, I wonder?"

After two or three rapid turns up and down this dark alley, where the sound of voices and music came to him through the open windows of Mr. Crawford's drawing-room, Philip went back to the house, and made his way through the crowded apartment. He would have left the Fountains without seeing Florence, but that young lady happened to be standing in his way to the door. She looked at him with a bright surprised face.

"Why, Mr. Foley, where have you been

hiding yourself for this last half-hour? You only appear to make yourself invisible. Baron Meiffenheim has been singing the most enchanting little German ballad, and I so much wished you to hear it. I know you like that kind of music."

"I like it so well that I am going up the Danube on purpose to hear it," answered Philip bravely. "Good-night, Miss Crawford; good-night and—good-bye."

He laid a solemn emphasis on the last two syllables, and suffered the little hand he had taken to fall suddenly from his loose grasp. Flo had been an accomplished coquette from the date of her thirteenth birthday, and was accustomed to heart-rending farewells; and yet she felt just one little pang as those solemn syllables fell upon her ear. It would have been so much more pleasant if the landscape-painter had waited to witness her triumphs, and to be excruciated by her fascinations, when she had entered the lists of bewitching matrons as Mrs. Thomas Lobyer.

The steamer left St. Katherine's Dock for Rotterdam at noon on the following day, and on

Monday night Philip Foley sat on the raised deck of the vessel smoking a cigar, and looking dreamily down at the phosphoric light upon the waves dashing past him with an eager palpitating motion, as if—or so it seemed to Philip—each silvery wavelet had been hurrying madly towards the English shore to kiss the feet of Florence Crawford.

"There's not a boat goes by us but seems to my mind to be sailing towards her, while I am going away," thought the despondent lover.

He was sorry that he had accepted the painter's kindness. He was sorry that he had pledged himself to become an exile from the land in which he had enjoyed the privilege of making himself supremely miserable for love of Florence Crawford.

CHAPTER VII.

TOO LATE FOR REPENTANCE.

After considerable parley, and much supplication on the part of the devotee Mr. Lobyer, it had been arranged that Miss Crawford's marriage should take place on the last day of June; and for a period of six weeks prior to that date the painter found his home a place of confusion and his life a conflict.

Of course it was quite impossible that Florence should herself arrange and superintend the preparations necessary for her bridal. Matronly aid was here indispensable; and in order to give that aid efficiently, Mrs. Frederick Bushby, otherwise aunt Jane, abandoned the care of her household to a useful maiden sister, and established herself *en permanence* at the Fountains. At her bidding came two estimable young persons in the dress-

making line, and an estimable elderly person renowned for plain needlework; and the scrooping and snipping of these worthy people's scissors set William Crawford's teeth on edge whenever he passed the open door of the apartment in which their labours were carried on. At Mrs. Bushby's bidding came also, at all seasonable and unseasonable hours, gentlemanly-looking individuals carrying pasteboard-boxes, who were generally announced as "the young man from Regent Street," or "the young man from Wigmore Street," or a "young person with some lace from South-Audley Street, if you please," or "the white-satin boots from Oxford Street, ma'am."

Poor William Crawford lifted his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders in utter despair when such announcements broke, time after time, upon the quiet of his meditative evening hours.

"Is there any social law which forbids a woman buying clothes after she is married?" asked the painter; "or how is it that a bride finds it necessary to stock her trunks with garments that might serve for a lifetime? Don't

imagine I wince at the amount of the cheques, my dear. You may have as much money as you like, Flo; but all this business about white-satin boots and old point-lace seems such unnecessary frivolity."

Of course, upon this Mrs. Bushby swooped down upon her brother-in-law, and annihilated him with feminine argumentation.

"When *I* was married, Madame Devy had *carte blanche*," said the matron, "though I was not an only daughter, and though I was going to marry a hard-working solicitor. Such a marriage as Florence is about to make is an event in society, and her *trousseau* will be a subject of conversation. The Wigmore-Street people have already asked permission to exhibit the cambric and Valenciennes *peignoirs* they are making for her; and the Oxford-Street people are going to introduce quite a new style for the Wellington boots we have ordered for riding."

William Crawford groaned aloud.

"And my daughter rides in Wellington boots!" he exclaimed. "Don't tell me any thing more

about the *trousseau*, if you please, aunt Jane. Ask me to sign as many cheques as you like, but don't let me know the particulars. Isn't it Owen Meredith who says, 'There are some things hard to understand?' surely a young lady's *corbeille de mariage* is one of them."

Mrs. Bushby did not trouble herself to notice these ribald remarks. She regarded her distinguished brother-in-law with placid contempt. It is not alone my Lord Dundreary who sets down every man who differs from him as a lunatic. In aunt Jane's opinion the royal academician was an eccentric creature, who made more money than one could suppose by painting scantily-draped young women, and who in the affairs of every-day life was little better than a fool. She suffered him to rail as he pleased against the frivolity of modern young ladies; and she revenged herself upon his cheque-book. The little people in Russell Square profited considerably by Miss Crawford's wedding; for Mrs. Bushby's calculations as to material for dresses that were to be made by the two estimable young persons were apt to err on

the side of liberality; and if a few yards of silk or velvet were left, dear extravagant Flo was always the first to propose that the fabric should be converted into a frock for Fanny, or a pelisse for Lily, or a tunic for Johnny, as the case might be.

And was the painter's daughter of so shallow and frivolous a nature as to find perfect happiness in days spent in milliner's show-rooms and before the counters of haberdashers? Was the society of Thomas Lobyer, who hung about the Fountains after his own loutish fashion at all hours of the day and evening, all-sufficient to satisfy the desires of her heart and mind? She seemed happy, for a young lady who laughs a great deal, and talks almost unceasingly, and pirouettes round the room on the points of her pretty little feet, with the smallest possible provocation, is generally supposed to enjoy a plethora of happiness. But that very close observer—who, like the typical policeman, is never in the way when he is wanted—might have perceived a shade of fever and hurry in Miss Crawford's gaiety which rarely goes along with unalloyed content. Perfect happiness is apt

to be very quiet. There is a solemn hush, a delicious repose in real joy, a delight too deep for words; and such delight had no place in the heart of Florence Crawford. She was pleased with her fine clothes; she was pleased with her jewels. She had more diamond hearts and crosses and crescents than she could count. She had an eagle newly alighted on a monster carbuncle, that looked like a block of translucent red-currant jelly. She had been satiated with suites of turquoise and opal, and had learned to discover a "feather" in a fifty-guinea emerald ring. She was pleased with the carriages which Mr. Lobyer showed her at the makers in Long Acre, and the horses that had been selected at one of Tattersall's crack sales, for her especial benefit. She was pleased with her visits to the upholsterer who was making new furniture for her rooms at Pevenshall, and who submitted his designs for her approval with as deferential an air as if she had been affianced to a prince of the blood-royal. There are some follies to which womanhood on the sunny side of twenty is prone to stoop, and Miss Crawford was weak

enough to be just a little intoxicated by the homage she received in the character of Thomas Lobyer's plighted wife, and a little inclined to forget that the enjoyment of all the glories and grandeurs derived from Mr. Lobyer's wealth involved a life-long alliance with Mr. Lobyer himself. And if the modern Iphigenia is so base a creature as to immolate herself of her own free will before the hymeneal altar, she is rarely without some kind female relation to urge her to the fatal step, and to push her forward with relentless hand, should she shrink from the consummation of the sacrifice. Aunt Jane lost no opportunity of vaunting her niece's good fortune, or of praising Mr. Lobyer—who, for his part, was barely civil to the obliging matron, and was apt to lapse into a state of despondent sulkiness when he found her in constant attendance upon her niece.

No, for the modern Iphigenia there is no such thing as turning back. The days hurried by the plighted bride with a relentless haste. The obsequious upholsterer bade his men work night and day, in order that the Pevenshall splendour should

be completed in due time. The coachmaker of Hatton Garden would have immolated himself on the floor of his workshop rather than have disappointed such a customer as Mr. Lobyer. The inestimable young women worked as if for a wager. The French milliner who made Miss Crawford's gala-dresses declared that she had broken faith with duchesses in order to keep her promises to the future Mrs. Lobyer. Flo tried to count the days that yet remained of her unfettered girlhood, but they seemed to slip away from her with a rapidity that defied all powers of calculation. Aunt Jane grew busier and busier as the days grew fewer; and the servants' bell at the Fountains had little rest from the hands of tradesmen's boys. Flo's pretty bedchamber was transformed into a chaos of parcels and bonnet-boxes, trunks and packing-cases. Glittering caskets of perfumery, mother-of-pearl glove-boxes, and enamelled handkerchief-boxes, wonderful boudoir inkstands in lapis-lazuli and ormolu, embroidered sachets, and perfumed pincushions,—all the feminine delights of M. Rimmel's emporium,—were

scattered upon dressing-tables and writing-tables, waiting to be packed. Every day the industrious females at work in the spare bedroom brought some newly-finished garment to swell the heap of silk and moire, muslin and cashmere, that was piled upon the sofa. Flo contemplated all these treasures with a bewildered face sometimes when she was quite alone; and there was some shadow of sadness in the bewilderment of her countenance.

"I wonder whether I am much better or wiser than the savages who are so fond of beads and feathers," she thought.

The modern Iphigenia has very little time for reflection. Poor Flo's life was a perpetual fever during those last days which were so difficult to count. Aunt Jane was never weary of discussing the bridal grandeurs, the bridesmaids' toilettes, the breakfast, the continental tour, the arrangements at Pevenshall. The only person whose equable spirits seemed entirely undisturbed by the excitement of this period was the bridegroom himself, who took matters as coolly as if he had gone through the same important crisis twenty times

before, and had become thoroughly *blasé* as to the emotions involved therein. He paid daily visits to the Fountains with laudable devotion, and he conversed with his future wife as much as it was in him to converse with any one, which was not very much; but he still clung fondly to the companionship of miniature bull-terriers and fawn-coloured pugs, and might be seen seated in the brougham that was too small for him, taking his airing in the Park with a fawn-coloured pug on his knee.

The time came very speedily when Flo found it easier to count the remaining hours of her unfettered girlhood than it had been to count the days. On the last day Mrs. Bushby went back to Russell Square to see to the finishing touches of her two elder girls' toilette, and to secure the Bloomsbury hairdresser for the arrangement of their tresses on the all-important morning. These juvenile cousins were to swell the train of Miss Crawford's bridesmaids, and were to exhibit themselves in marvellous costumes of pale-blue glacé silk and tulle.

But if aunt Jane had deserted her post upon this last day, she was not the person to leave disorder or confusion behind her. Every arrangement had been completed before the matron's departure. The formidable deed of settlement, which secured Miss Crawford a yearly income that might have satisfied a countess's requirements as to pin-money, had been executed with all due ceremony. The handsome trunks for the continental tour, the gigantic packing-cases that were to be sent straight to Pevenshall, were labelled, and Florence looked with a vague sense of confusion at the addresses in which she was entitled "Mrs. Lobyer." The smallest details had been carefully supervised by the indefatigable matron before she departed to spend a busy day in the bosom of her own household.

"I am going away quite easy in my mind, dear," said aunt Jane, when Florence escorted her to the porch; "for I don't think there has been an iota forgotten. You will see me again at nine o'clock to-morrow morning, with the children. And now, my love, be sure you take

plenty of rest, for I want you to look your best and brightest to-morrow."

There was nothing left to be done,—no more shopping, no more solemn interviews with the French milliner, no more excitement of any kind whatever, but a dead, sullen calm. No sooner had aunt Jane's hired brougham driven away from the gates of the Fountains than Florence Crawford's spirits sank as suddenly as the wind drops sometimes on a sultry summer's day. She went upstairs to her room, and on her way thither had occasion to pass those boxes whose primly-written labels had become obnoxious to her.

"It is such an ugly name," she thought; "*nobody* could like to be called Mrs. Lobyer."

In the bedroom Miss Crawford found the new maid who had been engaged to attend her in her altered estate; and if, in such moments of unreasonable depression, one individual can be more antipathetic than another, that individual is a new maid. The young person was busying herself with the arrangements of the dressing-table, and Florence fled from her as from a pestilence; but

not before she had caught a glimpse of the wedding-dress laid out on the sofa like a shroud, and looking almost as ghastly in its spotless whiteness.

"She'd want to talk to me if I stayed," thought Flo, as she hurried from her abigail's presence; "and I should have to hear all about her last place, and her anxiety to please me and understand my ways, and so on: as if I had any particular ways, except always losing my things and leaving my keys about."

Miss Crawford wandered into the drawing-room, and thence into an inner apartment which served as a library. The windows were all open, the birds were singing in the conservatory-passage that led to the painter's sacred chamber, the warm June sunlight shone upon dazzling flower-beds, and sparkled amid the waters of those marble basins which gave a name to William Crawford's abode. All things were looking their gayest and brightest; but poor Flo's heart sank amid this summer radiance. She closed the venetian-shutters, and seated herself in the darkest corner of the shadowy room.

She was quite alone. Mr. Lobyer had pleaded some especially important engagement of a business character as an excuse for his absence on this day, and Flo had told her father's servant that she would be at home to no one. She had the long summer hours to herself, and her aunt had entreated her to rest. If repose consists in sitting motionless in an easy-chair, with fixed eyes and idle hands, Flo certainly obeyed Mrs. Bushby's injunction; for the little clock on the chimneypiece recorded the passage of more than one hour while the bride-elect sat in the same attitude, with sad eyes fixed on one spot in the carpet, and listless hands loosely intertwined in her lap.

She aroused herself at length from this melancholy meditation; but she sighed more heavily than a millionaire's bride-elect has any right to sigh as she lifted her head and looked dreamily round the room.

"I don't know what is the matter with me to-day," she thought. "I seem to have grown sick of my life all at once; and if I am ever so

tired, I must go on living just the same. It is not every body who can die at a moment's notice, like Shelley's Ginevra."

Miss Crawford sighed heavily for the second time, and turned to the book-shelves near her with an impatient gesture.

"I don't suppose there is a creature in this world whose life will bear thinking about," she said. "What is it that dreadful person in the play says? 'These deeds must not be thought after these ways; so, it will make us mad!' I'm sure *my* life has been all hurry and excitement ever since I left school—one perpetual contest with other girls, as to which of us should wear the best dresses, and know the nicest people, and go to most parties. I sometimes think things might have happened differently if I had had time to think, and had been less influenced by other girls."

She took a book from one of the shelves haphazard; but there is a Nemesis who governs and pervades the trifles of every-day life. The book on which Miss Crawford's careless hand happened

to fall was a volume of the Waverley novels, containing *The Bride of Lammermuir;* and in the mind of a young lady who is about to make a mercenary marriage that sad story is likely to awaken painful ideas. Poor old George III. had a fancy to read Shakespeare's *Lear* at that time when he, like the legendary monarch, was old and distraught; and his physicians ordered that the pitiful tragedy should be kept from his hands; but the king was wiser than his medical attendants, and knew where to find the play in spite of them. He asked for Colman's Dramatic Works, which his unsuspecting servants willingly gave him, and amongst which he knew there was the modern playwright's adaptation of the grand old play. He read the tragedy, and was found by his daughters weeping. "I am like poor Lear," he said piteously; "but I have no Goneril and Regan—only two Cordelias." One can fancy the scene a touching one, and the king's daughters melted into tears that were not entirely bitter as they bent over the sorrowful old man, amidst whose madness there was so much wisdom.

Flo turned the leaves of Sir Walter's masterpiece listlessly at first; but who can read half-a-dozen pages of that wondrous story and not be interested? The sweet romance was very familiar to her; but she read on, charmed anew by the sad tender record of an "o'er true tale." She read on till her tears fell fast, and a vague sense of her own disquietudes seemed strangely blended with the sorrows of Lucy Ashton. She sat reading till her father's step on the tiled floor of the conservatory startled her from her abstraction.

"Are you all alone, my darling?" asked the painter tenderly, as his daughter laid aside her book, and rose to greet him.

"Yes, papa; I have been alone all day."

"But where is aunt Jane?"

"She has gone to the Square to see to the children's dresses for to-morrow," answered Flo with a sigh.

The thought of that bridal finery carried her back from Lucy Ashton's omen-haunted courtship to all the frivolous splendours of her own wedding.

"Why didn't you come to me, dear?" asked

the painter. "I should have liked to have had you with me on this last day."

"I thought you were working hard, papa, and I didn't like to interrupt you. And—and—I felt rather melancholy to-day. This house seems such a dear old place now I'm going to leave it; and I love you so dearly, papa, though I have never given you any proof of my love."

She clung to him as she spoke, and hid her face upon his breast. There were a few tears upon the collar of Mr. Crawford's coat when Flo lifted her head and slipped her hand through his arm, to lead him towards the dining-room.

"Tell me that I have not been a *very* wicked daughter, papa," said Flo pleadingly. "I'm sure I feel as if I were Goneril and Regan and those two dreadful sisters in Balzac's *Père Goriot* all in one."

"My pet, you have been a charming daughter," answered the painter, smiling.

"Yes, papa, but not a good one."

"As good as you have been charming, my darling, though just a little bewildering sometimes

in the way of slang phrases and Wellington boots. There, there, let me see my own bright Flo again. I suppose it's only natural that this last day should make you a little melancholy; but a lady of fashion ought not to be melancholy, even on the last day of her girlhood. I have always had a vague idea that nobody ever cried on the Piccadilly side of Oxford Street. Of course people must die every where, and there are grand funerals, and hatchments on house-fronts, and court-mourning at the West-end; but I did not think fashionable people were ever sorry. They seem to me like actors and pantomimists, obliged to put private griefs aside in order to comply with the exigencies of public life. Come, darling, we are to dine *tête-à-tête* to-day. You must imagine yourself a woman of fashion, who has taken a fancy for entertaining a popular painter."

"I had rather be your loving daughter, papa, and forget all about fashion," Flo answered sadly.

All the feverish gaiety of the last few weeks had departed, leaving a very real sadness in its place. But Miss Crawford was not the sort of

person to abandon herself weakly to any morbid feelings. She saw her father's eyes fixed upon her in earnest watchfulness, and shook off her despondency with one of those heroic efforts of which even frivolous women are capable. She talked gaily all through the cosy little *tête-à-tête* dinner, which the painter found very agreeable after that surfeit of aunt Jane's society, from which he had suffered of late. Throughout that pleasant dinner there was a tacit avoidance of all allusion to the grand event so near at hand. Flo talked of anything and every thing except Mr. Lobyer and the future.

"Papa," she cried suddenly, as they sat listlessly trifling with some strawberries after the table had been cleared, "let us spend the evening in your painting-room. I know it is your pet retreat, and I want to be a dutiful daughter for once in my life."

She crept behind the painter's chair, encircled his head with her arms, and kissed him on the forehead. So had his young wife stolen behind him sometimes, to administer consolation, during

those dreary days in Buckingham Street, when he had seated himself before his easel to stare blankly at his hopeless work, prostrate in body and mind. His daughter's touch recalled those departed days with all their mournful associations. He took one of the little caressing hands, and pressed it gently to his lips.

"My darling," he said very softly, "you remind me of your mother."

It was the first time he had ever said this in all his intercourse with his daughter.

They went together to the painting-room, and sat in the great bay window, through which the soft evening air crept towards them, like a soothing influence. The painter sat in his favourite easy-chair, looking dreamily towards the western sunlight, warm and golden behind a foreground of sombre green. Flo brought a low ottoman to her father's feet and seated herself upon it, with her folded arms resting on his knee, and her head drooping a little upon those round white arms. Not very far away from them, rapid broughams were hurrying to and fro in the shadowy Park,

bearing airily-attired beauty to the elegant solemnity of patrician dinner-tables, but in the painter's garden the faint sighing of summer winds among the leaves and the twitter of one belated bird alone broke the stillness.

Within the twilit painting-room neither William Crawford nor his daughter seemed inclined to break the spell of that summer silence. Amid the brightest and happiest surroundings there is always some touch of melancholy in the atmosphere of a summer evening, and to-night Florence Crawford was not especially happy.

"Papa," she said at last, after they had both abandoned themselves for some time to a thoughtful silence, "if I were going to live with you two more years, I think I should be a very different kind of daughter from the creature I have been."

She laid a contemptuous emphasis on the word creature, as in the extremity of self-humiliation.

"But why, why, darling?"

She did not reply to his question, but went on with her self-upbraiding.

"I would never call a picture of yours 'jolly' again. Had Rubens any daughters, I wonder?—surely with two or three wives he could scarcely escape daughters; and were they hateful, pert creatures like me, and did they call that wonderful picture he painted for the Arquebusiers 'jolly,' if there was any Flemish equivalent for that horrid word? I know how horrible it is now, since"—"since I've heard Mr. Lobyer use it," Miss Crawford had been about to say; but she pulled herself up suddenly, and continued, "since I've heard it worn threadbare by all kinds of people. O, papa," she cried with sudden enthusiasm, "I know what a great man you are, and how proud I ought to be of being able to call myself your daughter! I do know that, though I seem so vain and frivolous: and I know that your 'Aspasia' is the greatest picture that ever was painted—'bar none,' as Mr. Lobyer would say."

The little bit of slang escaped poor Flo's lips in the midst of her sentiment; but the painter was too deeply moved to be cognisant of the vile

phrase which concluded his daughter's exordium. He took her up in his arms and kissed her tenderly.

"My dearest girl," he said, with an assumed gaiety, "we do not expect to find the wisdom of all the sages under these crinkled golden locks; and if you have called my pictures 'jolly,' I am sure the epithet is infinitely more civil than many my critics have applied to them. Besides, you are to be as much my daughter in the future as you have been in the past, and I shall expect Mrs. Lobyer to be as deeply interested in my work as Miss Crawford has been. And now, dear, come into the drawing-room and sing to me. We mustn't prove ourselves unworthy of the blessing of aunt Jane's absence by lapsing into melancholy."

Upon this Florence embraced her father, and protested vehemently that he was the best and dearest of created beings. And then before he had time to recover himself, she buried her face in his breast, and sobbed aloud.

"Papa, tell me that you don't think me a

wicked mercenary creature," she cried; "pray, pray tell me that you don't think I'm that."

Who shall find words wherewith to set down the glory of that ceremonial which was performed on the following day at a fashionable temple? a temple the priests of which were broadly accused of Puseyite tendencies, and on whose communion-table there glittered brazen candlesticks. All the nursemaids of the neighbourhood dragged their charges to behold the splendour of Miss Crawford's bridal train; and the fashionable reporters were more than usually grandiloquent in their descriptions of the wedding.

Nevertheless it was very much like other weddings, except in the one grand fact that the bride shed no tears.

"I didn't cry, you see, papa," she said, when she found herself for a few moments alone with her father after the ceremony. "I feel myself quite a woman of fashion."

The brilliant Florence did not inform her father that she had been crying all through the

previous night, and that copious applications of cold water and *eau-de-cologne* had alone prevented her appearing at the fashionable altar with swollen red circles surrounding her pretty gray eyes.

The express-train that bore Mr. Lobyer and his bride to Dover on the first stage of their continental tour rushed past many a pleasant rustic dwelling, nestling deep amid summer verdure: and, looking down at humble homesteads and cottage-gardens, warmly tinted by the westering sun, the millionaire's wife thought sadly:

"I wonder whether the people who live in cottages marry for love?"

CHAPTER VIII.

TIDINGS FROM INDIA.

For Lady Cecil the summer months in Bloomsbury were very dreary. And it may be here confessed that Bloomsbury is rather dreary in the summer evenings, when the rifleman's "little drum has beat to bed" in the quadrangle before the Foundling Hospital, and vagrant children hawk pitiful bunches of flowers in the squares and streets. But are not the endless terraces and oblong squares of Tyburnia, and even the broad highways of Belgravia, apt to seem not a little dismal in the fading light, when the sickly gas-lamps struggle faintly with the last glimmer of day, and shabby wanderers prowl the pavements and look enviously at the rolling chariots of wealth?

Cecil O'Boyneville abandoned herself entirely

to the unbroken monotony of her life. She had yet to learn to find her own society and her own occupations, in common with the wives of other busy men. She accepted the lot that fell into her lap, and did not attempt to change or modify it. Her husband was kind to her, generous, affectionate, confiding, and she wished to do her duty. If Laurence O'Boyneville made no change in his bachelor-habits, if he devoted his nights to study and his evenings to sleep, he had perhaps some excuse for his devotion to the profession he loved, in the fact that his wife made no attempt to alter the scheme of his existence. No salaried housekeeper could have been more submissive than the Earl of Aspendell's daughter showed herself to the sovereign will of her lord: so Mr. O'Boyneville told his old friends and familiars that he was the happiest fellow in existence, and that his wife was an angel.

He was happy, for the woman he loved received him with a tranquil smile when he went home to his dinner, and was content to sit opposite to him while he ate his hasty breakfast behind

the *Times* newspaper. Even in his post-prandial slumbers he had a dim consciousness of that beloved presence. But he did not very frequently take the trouble to tell his young wife how dear she was to him. Having once won her to be the pride and delight of his quiet home, he took things for granted, and forgot that a man's real courtship only begins upon his wedding-day. If Cecil had complained of her life, Laurence O'Boyneville would have speedily set about adapting his existence to her pleasure; but she did not complain. She had married him because he loved her, and not because she loved him; and she shrank from indulging in the caprices which a wife who truly loved her husband would have exhibited without scruple.

A profound weariness of spirit took possession of the barrister's wife in the bright June weather, when the days were too brief for the glory of western London, and the midsummer evenings too long for tranquil Bloomsbury. For some time before her marriage it had seemed to Cecil Chudleigh as if the serious business of her life had been

done with. She was not unhappy. She was not discontented. But she had finished with all the eager hopes and desires of existence. She wished for nothing, she expected nothing. One only yearning—and that no ardent or passionate desire—had remained to her after the one great sorrow of her life,—she had wished for a home; she had wished to be something more than a waif and stray in other people's houses. This wish had been realised, and henceforward there was nothing left for her to hope or fear.

She had married without love; and yet no base or mercenary motive had influenced her conduct. Truly and unreservedly had she given her faith to Laurence O'Boyneville. It is for the man who marries such a woman to win or lose the heart which is not—and yet is so nearly—his. Unhappily, Mr. O'Boyneville, with all honesty of purpose and generosity of heart, took the very way to lose the prize which, of all earthly treasures, he most desired to obtain. If the barrister's wife had dissolved into tears at the breakfast-table or disturbed his digestive organs by a

storm of hysterics after dinner, Mr. O'Boyneville would have perceived that there was something out of gear amidst the machinery of his home, and would have done his uttermost to remedy the defect. But the disease which was undermining Lady Cecil's moral constitution was not sorrow; it was only the absence of joy. Of what could she complain, who desired nothing upon earth except a little rest after the weariness of her youth? She rested to her heart's content in the tranquil solitude of Brunswick Square, withdrawing herself day by day more completely from all old associations. If the days were joyless, they were at least without cares or troubles; the sordid perplexities of the past were done with—that slow torture called genteel poverty was hers no longer. An atmosphere of commonplace comfort pervaded the great O'Boyneville's household; and even in Dorset Square his presence seemed to carry with it an odour of prosperity—for Cecil was surprised to find that her aunt no longer bewailed the hardness of a dowager's lot, and the thievish propensities of landladies. Poor Cecil, who was so pain-

fully familiar with every note in the gamut of Mrs. MacClaverhouse's domestic economy, was astonished to behold those expensive and unprofitable dishes, which of old had been excluded from the Dorset-Square *menus*, now figuring frequently in the little banquets which the dowager provided for Mr. O'Boyneville and his wife.

"I ought to be happy," Cecil said to herself sometimes; and sometimes even in saying those words the faint odour of the sea came back to her like a breath of the past, and she saw the low gray shore below Fortinbras Castle, and Hector Gordon's face bent over her in passionate sadness.

"My fate was in my hand that day," she thought. "What would my life have been now if I had chosen otherwise than I did?"

It was not often that such thoughts as these disturbed the dull tranquillity of Cecil O'Boyneville's mind. She had learned to think very calmly of Hector Gordon, and the unknown future that might have been hers, long before she had plighted her faith to the barrister; and it was only now and then that the picture of the past flashed

for a moment upon her mental vision, evoked into life and brightness by some mystic power of association. She had learned long ago to think of the Scottish captain almost as we think of the dead; and in counting the years that had passed since that delicious autumn holiday, she marvelled to find how few they were. It seemed so long since she had seen that quiet Hampshire coast—so long since she had sat in the shadowy drawing-room listening to the low music of her lover's voice.

The season came to a close, Trinity Term ended, and the long vacation began. Laurence O'Boyneville implored his wife to take up her abode at some pleasant watering-place while he went on circuit.

"You can ask your aunt to go with you, Cecil," he said; "and in that case you'll have the use of her maid, if you don't care about taking one of your own. Suppose we say Ryde; that's as nice a place as you can go to. I'll run across and take lodgings for you, and I'll get you a basket-chaise and a stout pony, that you

can drive about the island to your heart's content. I want to see the sweet wild-rose tint come back to your cheeks, darling. You've been looking very pale lately."

It was not often that the speech of Laurence O'Boyneville the husband assimilated so nearly to that of Laurence O'Boyneville the lover, and Cecil rewarded him with a grateful smile.

"You are very kind, Laurence," she said; "but I know my aunt has made all manner of arrangements for the autumn and winter. She told me a few days ago that she has not a week disengaged. And I really don't care at all about going to the seaside. I would just as soon remain in town while you are away."

"My darling girl," exclaimed the barrister, "if you stay in London all the summer you'll be ill."

But again and again Lady Cecil protested that she would be contented to spend her summer in Bloomsbury. If she could have gone to some quiet seacoast-village alone, with no companions except her books and music, she would have been

very well pleased to escape from the wilderness of streets and squares. But a two-months' sojourn at a fashionable watering-place with a vivacious matron was something more than Cecil felt herself able to endure; and Mr. O'Boyneville seemed to take it for granted that his young wife must be protected by a chaperon when she left his sheltering wing.

"If you *won't* go to the seaside," he said, "you might at least spend a few weeks with the Mountjoys. I know they'd be delighted to have you."

"But indeed, Laurence, I shall be happier at home," Cecil pleaded; "I had so much visiting in country-houses, you know, before our marriage."

The barrister shrugged his shoulders. He had no leisure for further argument. His circuit work was very heavy, and his brain was already occupied by the claims and the counter-claims of Snooks *versus* Jones; of Simpkins against the Mayor and Corporation of Guzzleton (involving knotty questions under the Lands-Clauses Con-

solidation Act); an action for nuisance by Tittlebat against The Cesspool-Utilising Association, for allowing their reservoirs to drain into his fishponds; and by a variety of other cases in which sundry crooked and troublesome bits of evidence were, with the aid of his juniors, to be made smooth and straight for the benefit of those provincial litigants and delinquents whose rights, wrongs, interests, and defences had been intrusted to the popular O'Boyneville. Thus, in this, as in all other cases, the claims of business were stronger than the call of marital duty. Cecil had her own way, and spent the long July afternoons alone in the Brunswick-Square drawing-room, while her husband won fame and money abroad, and courted the laughter of hawbucks and clodhoppers in stifling provincial town-halls and court-houses.

But before Laurence O'Boyneville departed for his circuit-duties an event occurred which was to exercise an evil influence on Cecil's lonely reveries during those long summer days, those solitary evenings spent in the dim twilight of a dreary chamber.

Before winging her way to a Sussex manor-house, in which she was to begin her autumn round of visits, Mrs. MacClaverhouse came to take a farewell dinner in Brunswick Square. Some unwonted trepidation, some touch of unusual tenderness in the dowager's manner, impressed Cecil in the first few moments of that lady's arrival; but on asking her aunt if any thing was amiss, any direct reply to her question was artfully evaded by the dowager, who became suddenly interested in the state of Mr. O'Boyneville's health.

Before Cecil could repeat her inquiry, the barrister made his appearance, accompanied by another legal celebrity, whose cheering presence often illumined the dulness of Brunswick Square. Mr. O'Boyneville welcomed the dowager with his accustomed cordiality, and made an especial descent to the cellar to procure a particular brand of sparkling Moselle for that lady's consumption. The two legal celebrities made some faint pretence of general conversation while the soup was on the table; but with the appearance of the fish plunged at once into a discussion of the numerous points,

which bristled over the celebrated case of Blunderbuss against Saddlebags, lately decided in the Court of Exchequer; and then, by an easy transition, they floated into a debate upon the arguments of the respondent's counsel in that interesting appeal before the Lords-Justices. On ordinary occasions the dowager—who was always well posted in her *Times*—was apt to join in these legal disquisitions, and would give her opinion with sprightly intelligence and feminine decisiveness. But to-day Mrs. MacClaverhouse was evidently preoccupied. She allowed the gentlemen to express their sentiments without interruption or contradiction from her, and forgot to compliment Mr. O'Boyneville on the delicate aroma of his Moselle, or to whisper any little reproving speech to Cecil regarding the wasteful character of the banquet.

The dusk was deepening when the ladies went upstairs to the drawing-room; but when the barrister's inestimable man-of-all-work would have lighted the candles, Mrs. MacClaverhouse entreated that the operation might be postponed.

"I know you like mooning in the dark, Cecil," exclaimed the dowager, with some of her native sharpness, "and for once in a way I feel inclined for this half-light.—Come in half an hour, Pupkin; that will be plenty of time for the candles.—There's light enough for you to play to me, I suppose, Cecil?"

"Quite enough, dear aunt. Would you like me to play?"

"Yes, most decidedly. It's a treat to hear a decent piano after that old rattle-trap of mine. And your Broadwood is a magnificent instrument —something like a present from a husband. Ah, what a husband yours is, Cecil!" exclaimed the dowager, with sudden enthusiasm; "and I dare-say you think no more of him than if he was one of those men with red-hot pokers and hob-nailed boots that one reads of in the police-reports."

"But, auntie, I am very grateful—"

"Grateful!" cried Mrs. MacClaverhouse, impatiently; "gratitude has nothing to do with it. I tell you, child, you are utterly incapable of appreciating Laurence O'Boyneville."

Cecil had seated herself at the piano by this time. Her fingers wandered absently over the keys, and her head was bent in a pensive attitude. Mrs. MacClaverhouse watched her niece sharply as she bent over the instrument. The slender figure draped in white looked very fragile and phantom-like in the dusk.

"What would you like me to play, auntie?" Cecil asked presently.

"O, let me have one of your favourite reveries: your "Gondola," or your "Femme du Marin," or your "Source," or some of that dreamy nonsense you are so fond of. Play something of Mendelssohn's, if you like—those doleful "Songs without Words"—funeral dirges without the funeral, *I* should call them—which you were so fond of playing to Hector at Fortinbras."

Watching the frail white figure relentlessly athwart the dusk, Mrs. MacClaverhouse perceived a faint shiver disturb its repose as she said this. But in the next moment Cecil struck a few chords and began to play. Her aunt rose from the chair

in which she had seated herself, and came nearer the piano.

Cecil's music to-night was of the softest and tenderest character. Her fingers glided over the keys in a dreamy *legato* movement, and as the dowager watched and listened, two actual tears arose in those sharp worldly eyes, and blotted the picture of the slender white-robed figure, and graceful drooping head.

While Cecil was lingering fondly over a *piano* passage, the dowager startled her by a profound sigh. Any thing in the way of sentiment was so foreign to the habits of Mrs. MacClaverhouse's mind that Cecil looked up from her piano in unmitigated surprise.

"Ah, by the bye," said the dowager, "talking of Hector Gordon, I had some news from India to-day."

"Indeed, auntie!"

The same faint shiver that had stirred the white-robed figure before stirred it again. There are some things that can never be forgotten.

"Yes, I had a letter *viâ* Marseilles. Of

course, when people are wallowing in gold they have no occasion to think of sixpence more or less for postage. *My* letters have to go by Southampton. Bad news, of course, Cecil; who ever receives good news nowadays? I shall have to go into mourning; poor people's relations are always dying. I am really almost inclined to think they do it on purpose to involve one in the expense of mourning."

Cecil's heart gave a great leap, and then seemed to stand still. The human heart has a faculty of transforming itself into a lump of ice at such moments.

"What do you mean?" she cried, with a vehemence that startled the dowager; "is Hector Gordon dead?"

She rose from before the piano, trembling from head to foot. Mrs. MacClaverhouse caught her niece in her arms.

"My darling!" she exclaimed,—and perhaps it was the first time in her life that the strong-minded matron had ever employed so tender an epithet,—"do you think I should talk so coolly

about going into mourning for my boy?—who has been more than a son to me! bless his generous heart. Don't tremble so, Cecil; it is Hector's wife, poor young thing, who is dead."

"You—you frightened me, auntie," murmured Cecil, as she sank helplessly into the chair from which she had risen in her sudden terror. "You know how little Hector Gordon and I have ever been to each other—what utter strangers we are and must always be to one another now. But to be told, all at once, that a person you have known and been familiar with is dead, the shock—the—"

The words died on her lips. The sudden terror that had taken possession of her had given place to a new fear. She was alarmed by the intensity of her own feelings.

"If he were really dead," she thought, "what right should I have to feel like that?"

She recovered herself with an effort, and after a brief pause addressed the agitated dowager very calmly.

"Tell me all about it, auntie," she said; "it is very shocking—so young—so happy."

In the moment after having said these words, a pang of envy shot through Cecil's heart. Ah, what an enviable fate it seemed, this destiny which commonplace people are so apt to bemoan! To have one brief year of perfect bliss, and then to die; to live the life of the roses and butterflies; to be indeed the favoured of the gods.

"It seems there was a baby," said Mrs. Mac-Claverhouse, "though *I* had not been told there was any thing of that sort expected; and of course, if the poor child had lived, they would have looked for their godmothers elsewhere. The infant was a son, and Hector was delighted, and every body else was delighted. But things took a bad turn; the baby died, and the poor young mother fretted, and then there came a fever, and in three weeks' time my poor boy was a widower. I have had no letter from him yet, but they tell me he is dreadfully broken-hearted."

"It is very dreadful for him," murmured Cecil.

"And worse for her, I should think, poor thing," said the matter-of-fact dowager.

"I tell you, my dear sir, if Bamper goes in

for specific performance of contract, the defendant hasn't a leg to stand on," said the sonorous voice of Mr. O'Boyneville, who entered the room at this moment in hot argument with his friend. "Good gracious me, Mrs. Mac.!" he exclaimed, on entering the dusky chamber, "how is it they have left you in the dark all this time?—Cecil, what have you been thinking of? Where's that fellow Pupkin?"

The valuable Pupkin appeared with lights at this moment. The barrister's powerful will vanquished his household as it conquered all other opponents. The man-of-all-work had entered his service ten years before, a rough and unkempt lad, with no ideas beyond blacking-brushes and a knifeboard, to become in due time the very pink and model of indoor domestics.

Pupkin placed a moderator-lamp on the centre table, and lighted candles on the cheffonier and mantelpiece. He brought the tea-equipage, and attended on his mistress while she poured out the tea. Mr. O'Boyneville relapsed into profound meditation, as it was his habit to do while taking

tea. He was thinking fondly of the red bag which was waiting for him on the study-table below, and wishing that his brother luminary might be inspired to take his departure. But that gentleman was pleased to snatch an opportunity of making himself agreeable to his learned friend's aristocratic and elegant young wife, and was relating a facetious but strictly correct trial, which had convulsed one of the law-courts during the late term. Poor Cecil smiled faintly at the feeble witticisms, and tried her uttermost to be civil to her husband's guest. But she was very glad when Mr. O'Boyneville, after a protracted fit of staring, which was the next thing to epilepsy, started suddenly from his seat, and exclaimed:

"And now, my dear Sleghammer, I'll wish you good-night. I've got some very important papers to look through before I go to bed, and—"

"My dear Boyneville, don't use the least ceremony. I know how you work; and, bless my soul! it's past ten o'clock. But really I had spent such a delightful evening, that, upon my word, I—" murmured Mr. Sleghammer, looking

at Lady Cecil, whose society he had enjoyed for about twenty minutes since dinner.

When Mr. O'Boyneville's guest had walked away in the summer night, and when Mr. O'Boyneville had gone to his nightly labours, the dowager embraced her niece very affectionately before taking her departure in the phantom chariot, which had been prowling slowly to and fro in the square for the last half-hour, to the admiration of the boys of the district, who associated the equipage vaguely with the Lord Mayor.

"What a dear creature your husband is!" cried the dowager; "and how entertaining it is to hear all the little secrets of the law-courts! You ought to be happy, Cecil; you ought, indeed. But you girls don't know what real happiness is. And yet *you* ought to know the value of a good home, and a generous husband; for you have known what it is to be poor."

"Do you think that I do not appreciate my husband's goodness?" said Cecil earnestly. "Indeed—indeed, auntie,—"

"O yes," answered the dowager promptly,

"you appreciate his goodness perhaps; but you don't appreciate *him*. You just tolerate him because he is good and kind to you, and works like a galley-slave to insure your welfare in the future; but if he could read 'Victor Hugo' like a play-actor, and make an idiot of himself about Mendelssohn, you'd adore him."

This was the last Cecil saw of her aunt for some time, for on the morrow the dowager departed to the Sussex manor-house. Before the week was out Mr. O'Boyneville had also taken wing, and Cecil was quite alone in the big empty Brunswick-Square mansion. She had been allowed to have her own way. She had escaped the weariness of a seaside excursion—the familiar gaieties of country-house visiting. She was alone with her books and her music, as she had wished to be. She was alone, and she found the autumn days too long for her, the Bloomsbury mansion too big and empty.

Mr. O'Boyneville had no idea of being an inattentive husband. He sent his wife hasty lines scrawled on the flaps of envelopes in the intervals

of his professional labours, and the hasty lines were full of kindness and anxiety for her welfare. But a couple of sentences written on the flap of an envelope are not calculated to "speed the soft intercourse from soul to soul;" and the barrister's brief scrawls afforded his wife very little food for reflection during her lonely hours. She wrote her husband long dutiful letters, two and three times a-week; but she found this letter-writing rather a weary labour sometimes. What subjects were there on which she could be expansive? She took so little interest in his professional triumphs. He cared so little for her books and music. She shrank from putting her thoughts into words: but one conviction was slowly and surely taking root in her mind, and that conviction was that her marriage had been a mistake.

"He ought to have married some good comfortable creature, who would have found occupation enough in household duties," she thought sometimes. "I read too much, and think too much, until I begin to feel that there is something wanting in my life."

She had never dared to acknowledge to herself that the something wanting was a more genial companion than Laurence O'Boyneville.

"He is so good to me, and I ought to love him so dearly," she thought in those moments of self-reproach which came very often in her lonely days. "I know that he is good, and honourable, and clever; what more can I wish him to be? Surely I ought to be proud of such a husband when I remember the fate of other women. What would become of me if I had married such a man as Mr. Lobyer?"

There is a little story by Alfred de Musset, in which the heroine is married to a man whom she has passionately loved. She finds, too late, that there is little sympathy between them, and her life is very lonely. One night she is at the Opera—alone, as she almost always is; and when the music, which she adores, fills her with uncontrollable emotion, she stretches out her hand involuntarily to clasp the sympathetic hand of a friend. The poor little hand falls upon the arm of an empty chair. The husband is no amateur

of Mozart, and falls asleep on those rare occasions when he accompanies his wife to the Opera.

There were times when Cecil felt a vague yearning for the touch of that sympathetic hand; there were times when a chilling sense of intellectual loneliness oppressed her spirits, and when she felt that it would have been better for her if the daily cares about plate and china, and all the little sordid duties of her Dorset-Square life, had still demanded her thought and attention.

Did she ever think of the young widower far away in his time of mourning? Did the picture of that which might have been arise more vividly before her vision now that the cold hand of death had loosened Hector Gordon's bondage? Alas! yes; struggle as she might against the tempter, there were times when she felt herself weak, and wicked; there were times when the face that had looked down upon her under the sunless autumn sky looked at her again out of the shadows of her lonely room, instinct with the same melancholy tenderness—the same passionate devotion.

"I ought to be content to remember that for

one moment in my life I was loved like that," she thought. "I am as foolish as I am wicked when I let his image come back to me. What could I be to him if we met now, and I were as free as he is? Can I suppose that he remembers me, after all the domestic sweetness of his brief married life—after the terrible sorrow in which it has come to an end? Ah, no, thank God for that; the past has made a gulf between us which nothing in the present can bridge over. If we met to-morrow, we should meet as strangers. I can almost fancy the look of indifference I should see in his face."

If Cecil was a lonely wife, she was at least not a neglected or forgotten one. All things that can contribute to a woman's happiness—when considered from a prosaic and common-sense point of view—were freely furnished by Laurence O'Boyneville for the woman he had wooed so boldly and won so easily. A dainty little brougham, and a stout strongly-built steed had been provided for the barrister's wife. She had a coachman renowned for his sobriety, and

she had no occasion to suffer the ignominy of opening her carriage-door, or the martyrdom involved in the dangerous attentions of street-boys; for the inestimable Pupkin accompanied her in her drives, and marshalled her solemnly to her chariot after her calls or shopping. She had unlimited supplies of new music, and first-class subscriptions at more than one library. She had *carte blanche* at Howell and James's, and had she chosen to be extravagant, might have indulged her folly to the uttermost. She had a well-appointed although somewhat dingily-furnished house, and servants who gave her very little trouble; and if amidst all this substantial commonplace comfort the sympathetic hand and the congenial companionship which make the lives of some few women happy were wanting, she had surely little right to complain. That perfect circle which is the emblem of eternity is not to be found embodied upon earth, and there is always some missing link in the golden chain of sublunary bliss.

When all the brightness of summer had

vanished before the pelting rains and dull leaden skies of a stormy October, the barrister returned to his wife and his London engagements. She was really glad to welcome him back; even though he did seem a little bigger and louder, and more overpowering altogether, now that she had been separated from him for some months. Business of a special nature had kept him away from home after his circuit-work had been finished, and it was not till the middle of October that he was free to return. He came back to the old round of perpetual labour, and his work in the ensuing term threatened to be even heavier than usual; but he had time to see that his wife was looking pale and ill, and the discovery grieved and distressed him.

"I did wrong in letting you have your own way, Cecil," he said; "this autumn in London has done you harm. You are looking pale and ill. If you'll tell Pupkin to put a couple of shirts in my portmanteau, I'll take you down to Brighton to-morrow afternoon by the five-o'clock express."

It was in vain that Cecil protested that there

was no occasion for Mr. O'Boyneville to put himself out of the way on her account. The barrister insisted on the visit to Brighton; and on the following day, which was the last of the week, and the only one on which Mr. O'Boyneville could have turned his back upon the neighbourhood of the law-courts, Cecil found herself whirled seawards through the evening fog by the most delightful express-train in Christendom. The cool sea-breezes blew into her chamber at the Albion, and she saw the lights of the chain-pier burning brightly below her window as she arranged her hair before the glass. She found her husband comfortably established before a blazing fire in the sitting-room when she went downstairs; and in less than half an hour a little *chef-d'œuvre* in the way of dinners was served by the gravest and most attentive of waiters. After dinner Mr. O'Boyneville enjoyed his accustomed nap; while Cecil stood at the window, looking out at the moonlit sky and sea. Ah, who shall say what a treat the sea is after Brunswick Square—what refreshment to the eye in those big rolling waves—

what music in the sonorous roar of the sea, after the fifes and drums of the Foundling!

After tea Mr. O'Boyneville looked at his watch, and then rang for the waiter.

"I expect a parcel by the 9.45 train," he said. "Will you be good enough to inquire about it; and let me have a pair of candles on that table?"

The waiter bowed and departed. He returned in ten minutes, carrying a bundle, at which Cecil gazed wonderingly.

It was the barrister's crimson bag.

"My work follows me, you see, Cecil," said Mr. O'Boyneville. "I was anxious about to-night's letters and papers; so I told Jarvis to send the bag after me."

The attentive waiter placed candles on the side-table; and the great O'Boyneville seated himself before his papers. He worked indefatigably for the remainder of the evening. Cecil heard the stiff law-stationer's paper crackle as the barrister read his briefs, only pausing now and then to scrawl some note upon the margin, or to meditate profoundly, with a thoughtful scowl upon his face.

She had no books with her; so she drew back the curtain from before the window that commanded the sea, and sat by it, looking out at the moonlit waves and the lamps of the cliff and pier; and but for the roaring of the sea and the moonlight on the waters, Brighton would have been as dull as Bloomsbury.

On Sunday afternoon Mr. O'Boyneville drove his wife up and down the cliff in the clear cold October weather. He recognised several of his brother luminaries, who were taking the air on the King's Road, all more or less thoughtful and pre-occupied of aspect, and all meditating Smith *versus* Brown, or Jones *versus* Robinson, or some other cases in which their rhetorical abilities were to be displayed. The barrister entertained his wife by pointing out these distinguished individuals.

"Do you see that tall stout man, Cecil? No, not that one; the man nearest the lamp-post—the man who is blowing his nose? That's Bobbin, the great chancery-barrister—the man who—"

And then, when Cecil had confronted the east wind, and strained her eyes to the uttermost, and

ultimately had gazed reverentially on the wrong person, Mr. O'Boyneville went on to sing the praises of Bobbin; and a quarter of an hour afterwards poor Cecil had to twist her head in all manner of unpleasant positions, in order to behold a man in gray trousers and a brown overcoat, who turned out to be no other than the mighty Valentine, but who in outward aspect differed in no essential way from other men.

Lady Cecil was not interested in Bobbin or Valentine. If Laurence O'Boyneville could have shown her Victor Hugo or Alfred Tennyson taking their constitutional on that pleasant seashore, she would have thought it no trouble to twist her head and strain her eyes in order to look upon them; though even then there is some probability that she would have been disappointed in the mortal habitations of those mighty souls. Was not Lavater disappointed in Goethe, and almost inclined to disbelieve that the handsome young stranger presented to him was indeed the author of *Werter?*

After the conventional drive up and down the King's Road, Mr. O'Boyneville took his wife into

bleak solitudes beyond Rottendean. They drove between bare hills, through a bit of lonely country, where there were little homesteads scattered far apart, with lights twinkling feebly in the twilight —a lonely barren bit of country, whose atmosphere on an October afternoon has a soothing influence on the mind. The dim gray downs, and the sheep feeding high up in the clear air, seem so very far away from all London care and turmoil.

Both the barrister and his wife abandoned themselves to a contemplative mood during the long country drive; but after dinner they talked very pleasantly by the cheery fire, and Laurence forgot his red bag for once in a way, and became the man he had been during the brief holiday-time before his marriage—not very sentimental or metaphysical, but an agreeable companion nevertheless.

"I think the holiday has done us both good," he said to his wife, as an early express bore them away from Brighton on Monday morning. Mr. O'Boyneville had persuaded Cecil to stay a few days longer at the Albion, promising to return and

fetch her; but she did not care to stay at Brighton alone, with neither books nor music.

"I wish we could oftener be away from Brunswick Square and your professional work, Laurence," she said, with her hand in her husband's big palm. She felt drawn nearer to him by that one day's holiday than by all the domestic routine of their Bloomsbury life.

"Ah, my dear, that isn't possible," said the barrister, with a sigh of resignation.

Had the great O'Boyneville's fate been in his own hands, would he have had his professional labour less, his leisure for home-duties and home-pleasures greater? Alas! it is very much to be feared that he would not have so chosen. He was but mortal man; and the triumphs of the law-courts, the compliments from the bench, and the "roars of laughter" reported in the newspapers, are very sweet to the forensic mind.

A fortnight after the Brighton excursion there came a letter from Flo—a letter the contents of which Mr. O'Boyneville, who was sufficiently inquisitive upon occasions, begged to hear. As

Mrs. Lobyer's epistle, though intensely affectionate, was by no means confidential, Cecil complied with her husband's request. The letter announced Mr. and Mrs. Lobyer's return from the Continent, and establishment at Pevenshall; and the writer entreated her dearest Cecil, and her dearest Cecil's husband, if possible, to spend Christmas at that country mansion.

"You like Mrs. Lobyer, don't you, Cecil?" the barrister asked, when the perusal of the letter was finished.

"O yes, I like her very much indeed."

"Then why shouldn't you accept her invitation?"

"But can you go, Laurence?"

"Well, I rather fear not. I might run down for Christmas-day perhaps, and a few days after, while the courts are up; but that would all depend upon circumstances. In any case you ought to go, Cecil; the change of air and scene will do you good: you've not been looking well since my return from circuit."

There was some discussion. Cecil did not

care for gaiety; Cecil did not wish to leave her husband at Christmas time; but the barrister's strong will triumphed.

"I let you have your own way in the summer, and I found you looking as pale as a ghost when I came home. You must let me have my way this time, Cecil," he said decisively.

So it was decided that Lady Cecil should accept Mrs. Lobyer's invitation, and should go to Pevenshall on the fifteenth of December, where Mr. O'Boyneville would join her, if possible, during the Christmas week.

A few days before she left Brunswick Square Cecil received a voluminous epistle from the dowager, who retailed all the gossip of the house in which she was staying for her niece's amusement, and furnished the barrister's wife with a brief chronicle of births, deaths, and marriages, pending or otherwise.

The letter was written closely on two sheets of paper, both crossed, and in an obscure corner Cecil found a postscript.

"I have heard from Hector Gordon. His

regiment is ordered home, and he comes with it. Indeed, for all I know, he is in England at this moment."

"He is as far away from me in England as he was in India," Cecil thought, as she folded the missive. "My aunt must know that he and I would never wish to meet, and hers is the only house in which I should be likely to see him."

She showed Mr. O'Boyneville her aunt's letter; and even the obscure little postscript did not escape the searching eye of the barrister. He asked who the Hector Gordon was who was expected home; and Cecil had to explain her aunt's relationship to the Plunger captain, and to tell the story of the young man's marriage and widowhood, for her husband's edification.

CHAPTER IX.

AT PEVENSHALL PLACE.

Pevenshall Place was a noble modern mansion, which Thomas Lobyer the elder had built for himself in the days when he still hoped to find a worthy successor to his commercial glory in the person of the lad who was spending his juvenile leisure among lords and commoners on the grassy meads of Eton. The great millowner's wealth had been lavished freely on the solid grandeur and decorative splendours of Pevenshall. The house was in the Italian style,—a noble square white mansion, with a balustraded roof, surmounted by airy turrets, and a broad terrace-walk, that commanded one of the loveliest prospects in Yorkshire. No vulgar architect had designed the Manchester trader's dwelling. The millionaire of to-day begins life with gigantic

advantages. He has the benefit of two thousand years of civilisation, and may profit by the experience of emperors. Before the plans for Pevenshall were completed and approved, Mr. Lobyer had been made familiar with all the masterpieces of domestic architecture still existing in the present, or known to have existed in the past. He had disdained Stowe, and had rejected Fonthill; he had pooh-poohed Adrian's Villa, and turned up his nose at the abode of Lucullus. He had remarked that the apartments of Sallust, at Pompeii, might be eminently adapted for a gentleman's wine-cellars, but were utterly unfit for a gentleman's residence. After going through innumerable folios of drawings and engravings which his architect—happy in the expectation of five per cent on some fifty thousand pounds—had brought to him, Mr. Lobyer made his choice with that promptitude and decision which had regulated his conduct in all the most important affairs of life.

"If I can't have that," he said, laying the end of his square forefinger on an engraving of

Warwick Castle,—"and of course I can't, for I never saw any thing in the way of a castle built nowadays that didn't look like a workhouse or a gaol,—I'll have that;" and he transferred his finger to a water-colour sketch of a modern Italian villa in the suburbs of Florence; "or at any rate I'll have that kind of place—light, and bright, and cheerful-looking outside; but as warm and comfortable inside as an old-fashioned farmhouse, and from garret to cellar as solid as the Tower of London. Give me a drawing-room forty feet by twenty-five, an entrance-hall thirty feet square; and take care there's no such thing as a dark corner or a narrow passage in the house, and I shall be satisfied."

After having said this, Thomas Lobyer the elder declined all further discussion upon the subject of the house that was to be built for him. In the space of a few months the lordly mansion arose on the slope of a wooded hill-side, and all the district wondered at its grandeur. The architect had *carte blanche*. There were chambers panelled with oak and cedar, sandal and maple

wood. There was a staircase of Carrara marble, with balustrades of carved bronze, and lamps copied from antique Roman models. Julius Cæsar might have ascended such a staircase, and would have found nothing to criticise in the perfection of its appointments. Thomas Lobyer the elder approved of the mansion because it was large and handsome, and was very slightly affected by the odour of classicality that pervaded it. He freely paid the amounts which the great builder demanded of him, and it was only when he looked over his banker's-book at the close of the transaction, that he knew how dearly his fancy had cost. He sent the architect to London to give the necessary orders to upholsterers; and Pevenshall Place was furnished in perfect harmony with its architecture, but with very little reference to the peculiar taste of its proprietor.

The architect had an especial tenderness for the classical; and the great millowner, eating his frugal meal alone in his vast dining-room, illumined by candles in oxidised silver branches that might have appropriately adorned the banquet-

table in the Apollo chamber, was inclined to think his new mansion somewhat cold and cheerless of aspect. It may have been that the millionaire was prone to be dispirited on that first day of his occupation, for the morning's post had brought him a letter from the dame in whose house his son and heir was lodged, and the terms of the epistle were very uncomplimentary to Thomas the younger; and this feminine complaint about Master Lobyer's delinquencies — his cruelty to smaller and weaker boys—his falsehood and cunning—his obstinate resistance of authority—was only the beginning of the evil to come. From the day in which the millowner took possession of his splendid dwelling, until the hour in which he exchanged it for a very mean and narrow habitation, his life was poisoned by corroding cares—embittered by perpetual disappointments; and all his cares and all his disappointments had one common cause in the person of his son.

He took a disgust for the gorgeous mansion whose erection had cost him so much money. His troubles weighed very heavily upon him in those

spacious rooms, amidst whose chilly splendour there was no occupation for him. At Pevenshall the rich man found too much leisure in which to brood upon his cares and disappointments, and he was always glad to return to Manchester, where he had a comfortable dwelling attached to his great warehouses, and where he could steep his brain in the small vexations and perplexities of commerce, to the oblivion of the prodigal who was so slow to return.

Pevenshall Place, with innumerable lighted windows flashing on the darkness of the night, looked a very noble mansion as Cecil approached it in the luxurious brougham that had been sent to meet her at the Farnleigh-Heath station. No enchanted palace of fairy story could have shone more brilliantly upon the belated wanderer than did this substantial modern dwelling. Within, splendour and comfort fought for the mastery. A gigantic fire of sea-coal, surmounted by a monster log, warmed and brightened the great Italian hall, a desecration which would have excruciated the classic architect—who had devised an appro-

priate bronze stove, of antique design, for the heating of the vast chamber. Curtains of crimson cloth hung before all the doors, and the skins of wild animals lay side by side with Persian carpets and the snow-white fleece of peaceful sheep. The pair of matched footmen who were the chief glory of Mrs. Lobyer's establishment advanced to receive Lady Cecil's morocco travelling-bag, and to relieve her of her shawl. The splendid creatures knew that she was an earl's daughter; but they could not entirely conceal some faint tokens of that gentlemanly contempt which a high-bred footman must always entertain for a lady who travels without her maid.

"Which her connection with the peerage makes it wuss," said one of the gentlemen, when he discussed the matter at the social supper-table; "it's bringing the very horder she belongs to into contempt."

The gorgeous creatures relinquished Lady Cecil's burden to meaner hands immediately after taking them. They were attended by *aides-de-camp* in the shape of an under-footman and a boy

page; and their reception of the traveller's parcel had been a purely ceremonial act. One of these Corsican brothers of the servants'-hall drew aside a crimson curtain, and revealed a broad lighted corridor, with many doors, some of which were open, and along which echoed the sound of voices and the resonant music of laughter.

Before Cecil could follow the majestic footman, that individual drew suddenly aside, and a light fluttering figure, brightly attired in trailing garments of pink silk, half hidden under airy puffings of blonde, came hurrying towards the visitor.

It was Flo, brighter and more bewitching even than of old, with her golden hair tortured into an edifice of puffs, *à la Pompadour*, and sprinkled with glittering particles that sparkled in the lights.

"You darling, how good of you to come!" she cried eagerly. "I should have driven over to the station myself to meet you, but the house is so full of people, and I couldn't leave them. They are drinking tea in the blue room; will

you come and plunge into the midst of us at once, or shall I take you to your rooms? We have nearly an hour between this and dinner, and you see I am dressed, so for that time I am quite your own. Do come and see all my new friends, Cecil. You look charming after your journey—not a hair turned, as our sporting-visitors say; your little blue-velvet bonnet is delicious, and that gray-cloth travelling-dress becomes you admirably. Come, dear, let me show these provincial grandees that there is at least one woman in the world who does not talk slang, and is not the living, breathing image of every other woman."

Cecil pleaded for a retreat to her own apartments; but the vivacious Florence half led, half dragged her to the room whence had issued the sounds of revelry. It was an apartment which was small in comparison with most of the Pevenshall chambers, and which had that air of extreme cosiness and comfort with which very spacious rooms are not easily invested. Here the classic architect had been superseded by Florence and

the bric-à-brac shops of the West-end. Bright-blue hangings contrasted vividly with the cedar-panelling; tiny gems by modern masters, set in deep frames of ebony and gold, adorned the walls; and these gems were of the first-water, having been chosen by William Crawford as bridal-gifts for his only child. All that is most comfortable in the way of easy-chairs and most eccentric in the shape of tiny tables had been provided for this chamber; and here a party of vivacious ladies and agreeable gentlemen were grouped about the fire drinking tea, and talking with that pleasant abandonment which pervades unceremonious meetings between luncheon and dinner in an hospitable country-house. Cecil found the usual elements of such gatherings—two or three country squires, or heirs-presumptive, or younger sons of country squires; some military men from the barracks at Chiverley, the principal town within twenty miles of Pevenshall; a sprinkling of the London element, as represented by some elegant young members of the clubs; a German diplomatist; and a bevy of pretty girls, whose

maiden insipidity was relieved by a handsome widow and a coquettish matron renowned for an especial genius for the cultivation of Platonic attachments. Of course, every body was delighted to see Lady Cecil O'Boyneville. The one or two people who knew her were enchanted to meet her again, and the people who didn't know her were inexpressibly anxious to make her acquaintance. The new-comer was ensconced in the warmest corner of the pretty chamber, and country squires disputed for the honour of bringing her strong tea. The novelty of the scene was refreshing to her after the dull solitude of Brunswick Square; for let the jaded traveller be never so weary and heartsick, there is some faint sense of pleasure involved in the mere fact of being in an utterly strange place. In this cosy morning-room at Pevenshall all was brightness and colour. Every body was prettily dressed and smiling, animated, and happy—as it seemed; and amongst them all there was no one gayer or brighter than Florence—that mercenary Florence for whom Cecil had felt such profound compassion.

"And she really is happy," thought the barrister's wife, as Mrs. Lobyer stood in the centre of the little throng beaming upon her guests.

Florence insisted upon accompanying her friend to the rooms that had been prepared for her. They were very luxurious apartments, pervaded by that atmosphere of wealth which reigned in almost every chamber of Pevenshall Place. The marble mantelpieces were enriched with garlands of flowers; the grates were marvels of glittering elegance, the china was luminous gold and colour, the chintz draperies were as delicate and lustrous as satin, the boudoir was a nest for a lotus-eating visitor; the low Arabian bed looked like a throne, the pure white rugs were soft and stainless as new-fallen snow; and, seen through the bedchamber, the lighted dressing-room looked as fresh and bright as a chromo-lithograph. Fires burned cheerily in the three apartments. Wax candles in blue Sèvres candlesticks lighted tables and mantelpieces; and that traveller must have been indeed dead to the influence of externals who had failed to rejoice in such a luxurious shelter.

"What charming rooms!" cried Cecil.

"I am so glad you like them," Flo answered, cordially. "These rooms are close to my own, and I thought of you, dear, when I had them furnished; for though you have always lectured me, I think I like you better than any one else in the world, except papa." This was not a very promising speech from a wife of six months. Cecil was sincerely anxious about her friend's happiness, and was on the watch for faint indications tending to reveal the real state of things. Mrs. Lobyer had as yet made no allusion to her husband, and Cecil found it incumbent on herself to inquire after the wellbeing of the master of Pevenshall.

"I hope Mr. Lobyer is well," she said.

"O dear me, yes; he is very well," Flo answered, with supreme indifference. "I have not seen him for the last day or two. I suppose he is at Manchester. He is subject to periodical disappearances, and when he disappears people tell me he is at Manchester. It's very likely he will reappear at dinner-time; he generally does

reappear at dinner-time; and whether he has been out on the terrace to smoke a cigar, or a week away at Manchester, his manner is pretty much the same. I have heard people say that Mr. Lobyer is not gentlemanly; but I am sure that if it is correct not to admire any thing, and not to be surprised at any thing, and not to care about any thing,—except the rise and fall of that horrible, unsteady money-market, which fluctuates to such a degree that it makes me dizzy to think of it,—Mr. Lobyer is the prince of gentlemen."

"You talk of things as lightly as ever, Flo," Cecil said, wonderingly.

"Heaven help me when I begin to talk of things seriously!" answered Mrs. Lobyer, more earnestly than she was wont to speak. "And now, darling, I must run away. You have only half an hour between this and eight o'clock, and I want you to look your best, in order to astonish my Yorkshire grandees, who go to London once in ten years, and who, in the interim, fondly believe that the civilised world comes to an end somewhere beyond the city of York."

The Pevenshall dining-room, enriched by that splendid tribute which modern painters and modern sculptors offer to the golden calf of Manchester, was a very superb apartment. The Pevenshall drawing-room would not have shown meanly when contrasted with one of the saloons of Windsor; and in the drawing-room, leaning in a meditative attitude against one of the low mantelpieces, and worrying a Skye terrier with the toe of his boot, Cecil found Mr. Lobyer, who gave her a gentlemanly but by no means rapturous welcome to Pevenshall. "I hope my wife will make you comfortable, Lady Cecil," he said. "I'm sure she ought to do so, for she's been talking enough about you for the last fortnight, whether you would come, or whether you wouldn't come, and so on."

Mr. Lobyer's conversational powers were not taxed further just at present, for a ponderous butler announced dinner, and the host offered his arm to Lady Cecil, to the aggravation of a county matron who considered herself the leading personage at Pevenshall. He said very little during

dinner, and that little related chiefly to the aspect of commercial affairs in America, the tightness of the money-market, the drain of gold from the Bank of England, and other equally entertaining topics for general conversation. Two or three men at Mr. Lobyer's end of the table listened reverentially to any words that fell from his lips, and discoursed with much gusto upon his favourite subjects; but the rest of the party divided themselves into little clusters, and a buzz of animated chatter filled the room. In the course of a commercial discussion it transpired, incidentally, that Mr. Lobyer had spent the last few days in Manchester, and that things were looking dull there, and this was all that he said about his absence from home.

The evening glided by very rapidly in the great drawing-room, where there was room for a carpet-dance without disarrangement of furniture, and where there were all manner of delightful nooks and corners for confidential conversation. A social tragedy might have been enacted in one corner of that spacious apartment, while the gene-

ral occupants of the chamber were laughing and talking in supreme unconsciousness of domestic storm or trouble. The evening passed very pleasantly. When a large party is assembled in a country-house there are generally to be found some nice people, and at Pevenshall the nice people were in the majority. There were musical people, and people who were madly devoted to amateur theatricals; and there was one gentleman who was great in the performance of spirit-rapping and table-turning; and another gentleman who shone as an *improvisatore*, and who sang extempore buffo-songs, which every body thought delightfully clever, but which would have seemed atrociously stupid if people had had sufficient time or presence of mind to grasp the full meaning of the words, or if the singer had not been artful enough to cover his worst puns and his most excruciating rhymes by a volley of common chords.

Altogether the evenings at Pevenshall were successful; the more so perhaps because the master of the house was apt to withdraw himself to the smoking-room or the billiard-room, with a few

chosen companions. When bidding Flo good-night on this first evening of her visit, Cecil declared that she had enjoyed herself very much.

"I have been leading such a quiet life lately, that I did not think it was in me to enjoy society so much as I have done to-night. What nice people some of your new friends are, Flo!"

"Do you think so?" Mrs. Lobyer said, elevating her shoulders with a little gesture, which was the last thing in fashion in the best Parisian circles. "Perhaps you have not seen the nicest of them yet."

CHAPTER X.

SIR NUGENT EVERSHED.

If Cecil had sighed for a life which should be a complete change from the dull round of existence in Brunswick Square, she could not have found any where a more perfect realisation of her desire than was to be found at Pevenshall Place. Here, from the ten-o'clock breakfast to the abnormally late hour at which the last lingerers in the big drawing-room took their reluctant departure, the order of the day was gaiety. Florence devoted herself to one incessant round of amusement, and her visitors seemed nothing loth to follow her example. Amidst the pleasant frivolities of Pevenshall, it was almost difficult to remember that there was any portion of this universe in which "men must work and women must weep," and that reasonable beings were created for any graver purpose

than the playing of billiards, the acting of charades, and the composition of *bouts rimés*.

Cecil would fain have seen a little more of her old friend, and in some manner renewed the confidential intimacy that had existed between them before Flo's marriage, but Mrs. Lobyer gave her visitor no opportunity for confidential conversation. She was very affectionate; she was full of anxiety for her friend's comfort and enjoyment, but she avoided all chances of *tête-à-tête*, and seemed to have a nervous terror of being questioned about herself. Perceiving this, Cecil began to fear that Florence Lobyer's life was not entirely happy, in spite of its incessant gaiety.

"You had a pleasant tour, I hope, Flory," she said one day when they were alone for a few minutes.

"O yes, we tore about Europe as fast as express-trains and post-horses could take us, and we spent a few weeks in Paris on our way home. Paris is a nice place for shopping. I believe I wasted a small fortune on the boulevards and in the Rue de la Paix; for Mr. Lobyer made

quite a wry face when he saw my bills. We drove in the Bois a great deal, and went to a few nice parties, and ate a good many expensive dinners, and went several times to the Opera; where Mr. Lobyer slept very comfortably, and where I amused myself by looking at the diamonds, and mentally comparing them with my own. I only saw two people whose jewelry was worth mentioning, and they were a Russian princess and a French actress. Yes, on the whole, I think we had a very pleasant tour. And now tell me about Mr. O'Boyneville. Are you happy with him?"

"Yes, dear, I have every reason to be happy, for he is very kind to me."

"And you really like him?"

"I really like him very much indeed."

This was the nearest approach to a confidential conversation that occurred between Florence and her friend during the first week of Cecil's visit.

The days passed very quickly, the evenings were delightful, and it was not often that even the most transient cloud obscured the brightness

of Mrs. Lobyer's countenance. The master of Pevenshall inflicted very little of his society upon the guests who enjoyed themselves in his mansion. There were two or three horsy-looking men and two or three commercial magnates with whom he chiefly consorted. His mornings were spent in hunting when the weather was favourable, or in lounging about the great quadrangle, surrounded by outbuildings and stables, examining his horses, presiding over a rat-hunt, or worrying his dogs, when the hounds and huntsmen were fain to be idle. His evenings were devoted to the society of his own particular friends in the billiard- or smoking-rooms; and, except at dinner-time, he rarely intruded on his wife's circle.

After observing her friend for some time with affectionate anxiety, Cecil began to think that perhaps the life which the painter's daughter had chosen for herself was very well suited to her.

"Why do I wonder about her?" Cecil thought, as she saw Mrs. Lobyer the gayest and most animated of all the Pevenshall party; "she possesses every thing which most women sigh for from the

hour in which they leave the nursery, and it would be strange indeed if she were not happy."

But then came the thought of the future. Must not the time come when the pleasures of a fine house and agreeable society must pall upon the mistress of Pevenshall? Four or five years hence, when custom had robbed these joys of their bloom and freshness, was it not terribly probable that Mr. Lobyer's wife would awaken to nobler aspirations, only to find that she had awakened too late? Then how commonplace and monotonous the unvarying round of country-house gaieties, the turmoil of London dissipations, must seem to the woman who had made it the business of her life to win them!

"She is younger than I am, and she does not know how soon one grows tired of these things," thought Cecil. "I have sometimes thought, when driving up and down by the Serpentine with my aunt, that the treadmill could scarcely be worse than the Lady's Mile must be to women who have lived ten or fifteen years in society, and have gone through the same routine year after year."

On the twenty-fourth of December a letter came from Mr. O'Boyneville, announcing his inability to spend Christmas at Pevenshall.

"I have made a great effort to come to you, but I find my work for Hilary Term so heavy that I dare not turn my back upon my study. You would scarcely like to see my crimson bag in the Pevenshall library, and if I came I should be obliged to bring my bag with me. So enjoy yourself without me, my dear, and forget that there is such a person as Laurence O'Boyneville in existence."

"He is not jealous, at any rate," said Flo, after hearing this part of the letter: "what a blessing it is to have a husband who is not afflicted with a jealous disposition! If Mr. Lobyer were to see me flirting with half-a-dozen people at once, I don't think the spectacle would disturb the serenity of his mind."

"You speak as if you wished to make him jealous, Flo."

"Well, I don't know about that. Sometimes, perhaps, I really do wish to make him—some-

thing. You don't know how provoking those husbands who are not jealous can be. If Mr. Lobyer only watched me as closely as he watches the money-market, he would be a perfect Othello."

"But you cannot be displeased with him for devoting himself very much to business, Flo," argued Cecil; "for all the luxury and splendour of this house are the fruits of his commercial successes."

"Now you're going to lecture me," exclaimed Florence impatiently. "While I was engaged to Mr. Lobyer, every body seemed to take a delight in abusing him; but now I'm married to him, people preach about him as if he were a saint. Even papa, who was so much against my marriage, never writes to me without some little bit of preachment about my duties as a wife. I don't set up for being a model wife; and if Mr. Lobyer is satisfied with me, I really can't see what right other people have to interfere."

After this Florence apologised for her impatience, and embraced her dearest Cecil after her wont.

"And now, darling, I want you to come and walk on the terrace with me. It's a delightful morning, more like October than December; and we'll leave all those worsted-working and piano-strumming people in the drawing-room to amuse themselves. Run and put on your warmest shawl. I'll wait for you here."

This conversation had taken place in the morning-room, where Cecil had found Mrs. Lobyer alone for once in a way, an hour after breakfast. Flo was already dressed for walking in a coquettish black-velvet jacket, trimmed with chinchilla, and a bewitching little hat, adorned with a peacock's breast.

Mrs. Lobyer was dressed more carefully than she was wont to attire herself for a walk on the terrace. Her dark-gray poplin dress was looped up on each side, revealing a glimpse of a scarlet-cloth petticoat, a pair of miraculous boots, and the faintest scintillation of gray-silk stockings. Her little gauntlet-shaped gloves were the prettiest that ever came from the hands of a glovemaker, and fitted to perfection. Her hair was tied in

a clustering knot, which was the perfection of artistic carelessness, and one little bit of turquoise blue ribbon peeped from amidst the gold-coloured tresses.

"I think even papa would confess I had some idea of colour if he saw me to-day," said Mrs. Lobyer, as she mounted a little ottoman and surveyed herself in a Venetian mirror framed in the cedar-panelling. "I discovered the value of grays and scarlets from one of his pictures. I'm sure I don't know why I should have taken pains with my dress this morning: but one must amuse oneself somehow or other."

Mrs. Lobyer smothered a little yawn with the fingers of her pearl-gray gloves, and went to one of the windows whence there was to be seen a sunlit winter landscape, with all the varying beauties of light and shadow playing upon hill and dale, and wood and water, which made the prospect from the south front of Pevenshall Place one of the finest views in the North Riding.

Cecil joined her friend a few minutes afterwards, and the two ladies went out upon the ter-

race, where they met Mr. Lobyer, who was hurrying towards the steps leading to the carriage-drive with a railway rug on his arm.

"You are going away?" asked Flo, politely.

"Yes. I find I must run to Manchester this morning. I shall be back in time for dinner to-morrow."

"You will travel on Christmas-day?" exclaimed Flo, with a slight elevation of her eyebrows.

"Why not on that day as well as any other?" said Mr. Lobyer coolly. "Do you think I am to stop my business because people choose to over-eat themselves with beef and pudding on the twenty-fifth of December? Good-bye, Flo; I've only half an hour for the drive."

The millionaire brushed his wife's forehead with his bushy moustache, and then ran down the steps, where an American gig with a high-stepping horse and a miniature tiger were in attendance upon him. In this airy equipage Mr. Lobyer was borne along the avenue as on the wings of the winter wind; and, seen from a distance, pre-

sented an appearance of high-stepping horse, man, and high wheels, without any superfluous encumbrance in the way of vehicle.

"And now let us enjoy ourselves and have some nice talk," said Flo, when she had stood for a few moments watching her vanishing lord and master with eyes which did not even express that spurious kind of interest called curiosity. "Your bonnet is very pretty. How do you like my hat?"

After this lively commencement the conversation flagged a little. When people deliberately set themselves to talk, they are apt to be seized with a kind of mental paralysis, which deprives them, for the time being, of the faculty of intelligent speech. The two ladies walked briskly up and down the long stone-terrace, and a delicate flush deepened in Mrs. Lobyer's cheeks, and heightened the brilliancy of her eyes. The great clock in the quadrangle had struck twelve as Mr. Lobyer departed; but that gentleman had scarcely been absent ten minutes when Florence produced her watch, and consulted it as carefully as if she

had been one of the Manchester men in whose society Mr. Lobyer delighted.

The two ladies walked several times up and down the terrace; but in spite of Cecil's efforts the conversation still flagged. When Cecil admired the view, Mrs. Lobyer owned that it was charming—while the magic of novelty lasted.

"One gets used to it," Flo said indifferently. "I daresay if people could live on the summit of the Matterhorn, they would get used to that, and think very little of it. When first I came here I used to look out of my dressing-room window and admire the prospect while Carstairs was dressing my hair; but now I take no more notice of the view than if I were living in Russell Square."

After this Mrs. Lobyer relapsed into silence; and perceiving that she was preoccupied, Cecil abandoned herself to her own meditations, though not without some wonderment as to why Flo had made such a point of bringing her out on the terrace when she had nothing particular to say to her.

They had walked for some time in silence, when the sound of horses' hoofs upon the hard carriage-drive made them both look up. The pretty pink flush deepened ever so little on Mrs. Lobyer's cheeks as a horseman, followed by his groom, rode rapidly towards the terrace-steps.

"It is Sir Nugent Evershed," said Flo; "now, Cecil, you are going to see one of the best men of the country—enormous wealth, without the faintest association with the money-market,—and O, how delightful money without the market must be!—and an interminable line of ancestors; though, if ancestors didn't generally reveal themselves in high insteps, aquiline noses, and taper fingers, I shouldn't set any particular value upon *them*."

All this was said very rapidly, very gaily, very lightly; but lightly as it was said, Lady Cecil wondered a little at the warmth of Mrs. Lobyer's complexion and the new brightness in Mrs. Lobyer's eyes.

Sir Nugent Evershed surrendered his horse to the groom at the bottom of the terrace-steps,

and came on foot to greet the ladies. He was one of those rare exotics—those hothouse-flowers in the garden of youth—which, so long as grace and beauty are worshipped upon the earth, will always find tender cherishers, even though some drops of subtle poison mingle with the perfume,—even though a base of clay sustain the torso of the god.

He was the very pink and pattern of the *jeunesse dorée*, the type of man that has appeared with but little variation of form in every century; the Alcibiades, the Essex, the Cinq Mars, the George Villiers, the handsome Lord Hervey,—the butterfly whose gilded wings excite the indignation of wiser men, but who laughs at their wisdom and defies their scorn, serene in the enjoyment of his butterfly triumphs.

Sir Nugent was fair, with blue eyes and pale-amber moustache and whiskers. The Alcibiades of the present day is generally of a fair complexion, and our friends on the other side of the Channel may talk now of the *blonde meesters* as well as the *blonde meess* of the *brumeuse Angleterre*.

Florence introduced Cecil to the elegant young baronet, who seemed on very familiar terms with Mrs. Lobyer. He entreated the ladies to continue their walk, and strolled up and down the terrace with them.

"I will go and look for Lobyer presently," he said. "I suppose I shall find him somewhere about the house or stable, as it is scarcely a hunting morning."

"You will not find Mr. Lobyer till to-morrow," answered Flo; "he has gone to Manchester."

"Again! What an extraordinary attachment he has for Manchester! I never cared much myself for the Cottonopolis; it seems to me London without the West-end."

After this Sir Nugent made himself eminently agreeable. The butterfly of the nineteenth century must not be altogether a foolish butterfly; for the gentler sex, whose suffrages he courts, are very far in advance of the Belindas and Saccharissas of the past. Sir Nugent had been to every place that was worth a gentleman's visiting, had seen every thing worth seeing, and read almost every

book worth reading. He was a proficient in all gentlemanly sports; at nine years of age he had "passed" as a swimmer at Eton, and at nineteen had been stroke-oar in one of the Oxford boats. He was as much at home deer-stalking and eagle-shooting in the Highlands as he was in the West-end clubs, and his only effeminacy consisted in the whiteness of his hands and the careful taste of his costume.

The two ladies and the baronet went into the house presently, and made their way to the drawing-room, where Sir Nugent was welcomed with universal cordiality. He had a cousin staying in the house, a fast young lady with out-of-door propensities,—a young lady who wore clump-soles to her boots, defied wet weather, and unblushingly consumed a whole grouse at the breakfast-table before the face of mankind. A young lady whose mother is a county heiress, and whose paternal ancestors have been drawn and quartered in the dark ages, may venture to take life after her own fashion.

Sir Nugent stayed to luncheon, and Sir Nu-

gent lingered in the great drawing-room all through the winter afternoon. In the twilight Florence asked her friend for a little Mendelssohn; and while Cecil played the tender music the baronet and Mrs. Lobyer stood in a bay-window near the piano, talking in hushed voices attuned to the pensive melody. There were a good many people in the room; but it was a dangerously spacious apartment, in which conversation was apt to degenerate into *tête-à-tête*. When lamps were brought, the party of ladies, with Sir Nugent and two or three other gentlemen amongst them, adjourned to the morning-room to take tea; and still the baronet lingered, assisting in the dispensing of the cups and making himself eminently useful to Mrs. Lobyer.

"Thank Heaven, we are drifting back into the cosy ways of our ancestors," he said, as he leant against the corner of the mantelpiece nearest Flo's chair. "This ante-prandial tea is the most delightful invention, and if we could only bring ourselves to dispense with the dinner, how very agreeable our lives would be! Do you expect to

see Mr. Lobyer this evening?" he asked Florence.

"I think not. He talked about coming back to-morrow."

"On Christmas-day! Ah, well, I suppose there is no Christmas for millionaires. Imagine the Marquis of Westminster eating turkey, and calling it Christmas! He could have turkeys all the year round. He might have a dish made of the tongues of a thousand turkeys on his breakfast-table every morning if he liked. There can be no such thing as change of season for the millionaire. His house is warmed from roof to basement with hot-air pipes, and he has peaches all the year round. I should like to have seen Lobyer to-day, and I have inflicted myself upon you most shamefully in the hope of seeing him."

"I don't believe Nugent ever thought himself an infliction in the whole course of his life," cried the fast young lady cousin. "He is the vainest of men, and thinks that we ought all to be intensely grateful for having enjoyed the privilege of his society. All the girls in the North Riding spoil

him, because he happens to be the most eligible bachelor on hand now that Lord Loncesvalle has married. I remember Lord Loncesvalle—such an elegant young fellow, when he was canvassing the Conservative interest for Chiverley. And I really think I wrote poetical squibs against his opponents. Pray run away, Nugent. It's no use your staying, for Mrs. Lobyer can't ask you to dinner in that coat; and it is time for us all to dress. Don't forget to write to Jeffs for the comedy we want to play on the 16th of January. Remember, you are to be the Marquis, and we must form a committee for the discussion of the costumes early next week."

"I will ride over the day after to-morrow," answered Sir Nugent; "and I will bring the piece with me."

He bent over Florence to shake hands and say good-bye, and there was in that adieu just the faintest suspicion of a something beyond the routine of ordinary acquaintance. He shook hands with his cousin, and went through a little fernery that opened from the morning-room and led out upon

the terrace, below which his groom had been pacing up and down for the last half-hour leading the two horses.

It was a clear moonlight night, and Miss Grace Evershed went to one of the windows to watch her cousin's departure.

"Nugent must find our society amazingly delightful, or he would never have allowed Pyramus to wait half-an-hour in the cold," cried the young lady. "He is generally so absurdly particular about his horses—and Pyramus is a recent acquisition. I think Nugent gave something between four and five hundred for him."

Cecil and Florence went up to their rooms together that night, and Flo followed her friend into the pretty little boudoir, where a red fire was burning with a frosty brightness.

"You are not sleepy, are you, Cecil?"

"No, dear, not in the least."

"Then if you've no objection I'll stop for a few minutes," said Flo, seating herself in one of the pretty chintz-cushioned easy-chairs, and playing with a Chinese hand-screen. "For my own

part I never feel so thoroughly awake as at this time of night. I think if people sat up for eight-and-forty hours at a stretch, they would go on getting brighter and brighter. As it is, we chop our lives up into such little bits, and are seldom either quite awake or quite asleep. How do you like Sir Nugent Evershed?"

The question was asked very carelessly, and the questioner's eyes were fixed upon the fire.

"I really don't know him well enough either to like or dislike him," Cecil answered.

"Nonsense, Cecil! that's a lawyer's answer. Women always jump at conclusions, and I have no doubt you have jumped at yours in this case. You couldn't be half-a-dozen hours in Sir Nugent's society without forming some opinion about him."

"Well, dear, I think he is very handsome."

"Do you?" said Flo, lifting her eyebrows, and shrugging her shoulders. "Well, yes, I suppose he is what most people would call handsome."

"But you don't call him so?"

"Well, no; I have seen handsomer men. But

what do you think of *him*—his manners—himself, in short?" Flo asked rather impatiently.

"I think he is exactly like a great many other young men I have seen—"

"Good gracious me!" cried Flo, this time very impatiently, "do you mean to tell me that the generality of young men are as elegant and accomplished as Sir Nugent Evershed?"

"No, I don't mean to say that exactly. But I think the generality of young men in the present day are very accomplished. They all travel a great deal; they all read, they—"

"Cecil, if you're going to talk like a blue-book, or a statistical paper, I shall go away. I see you don't like Sir Nugent."

"My dear girl, I never said any thing of the kind. I only say that he seems to me like a great many young men I have seen. Rather more handsome, and rather more accomplished, and rather more elegant than the generality of them perhaps, but only differing from them in degree. Is he a great friend of Mr. Lobyer's?"

"Yes," Flo answered, still looking at the fire;

"they are very intimate. Are not those pretty tiles, Cecil?" she asked, suddenly turning her eyes on the encaustic tiles that surrounded the grate. "I chose the design myself. The architect had put a bronze stove into this room, and it was to be heated with hot-air pipes. Imagine a boudoir heated with hot-air pipes! I think when one feels particularly miserable there is nothing so consoling as a cosy fire. A soothing influence seems to creep over one as one sits in the twilight, looking into red coals. And how, in goodness' name, could one sit and stare at pipes? I suppose architects never are unhappy."

This speech seemed to imply that unhappiness was not altogether a stranger to Mrs. Lobyer. But Cecil did not take any notice of the remark. When a young lady chooses to marry as Florence Crawford had married, the wisest course for her friends is to ignore the peculiarities of her lot, and to take it for granted that she is happy.

"Yes," Flo said, after a pause, "Sir Nugent and Mr. Lobyer are very intimate; and there is something almost romantic in the circumstances

of their friendship. They were at Eton together; they were of the same age, in the same class, and they lived in the same house; but they were the most bitter foes. There was quite a Corsican vendetta between them. Sir Nugent represented the aristocratic party, Mr. Lobyer the commercial faction. They were the Guelphs and Ghibellines of the form. Of course, under these circumstances, they were perpetually fighting, for it really seems that the chief business of Eton boys is to fight and play cricket. One day, however, they had a desperate battle in a place called Sixpenny, though why Sixpenny is more than I can tell you. The fight was going against Mr. Lobyer —for I believe Sir Nugent is enormously strong, though he looks so slender—and the backers were persuading him to take a licking—that's the Eton term, I believe, for giving in; but he wouldn't give in; and while they were wrestling, he took a knife from his trousers-pocket, and stabbed Sir Nugent in the arm. It wasn't much of a stab, I believe, but the backers informed the masters of the business, and there was a tremendous outcry

about it, and Mr. Lobyer was expelled the school. Of course he was very young at the time," added Flo, rather nervously; "and I suppose boys of that age scarcely know that it is wrong to use a knife when the fight is going against them."

Cecil did not answer immediately. She had never liked the gentleman whose hospitality she was enjoying, and this little episode from the history of his school-days was not calculated to improve her estimate of him.

"And yet Sir Nugent and Mr. Lobyer are now quite intimate," she said presently, feeling that she was called upon to say something.

"Yes, that is the most singular part of the story. After that Eton *fracas* they saw nothing of each other for years and years. They went to different universities, and Mr. Lobyer, as you know, finished his education on the Continent. When the Pevenshall estate was bought, Mr. Lobyer senior discovered that the country-seat of his son's old enemy was within ten miles of the place. The country people received Mr. Lobyer the elder with open arms; but he didn't care for society,

and as he went out very little, he never happened to meet Sir Nugent. And as my husband was very seldom here, *he* never happened to see Sir Nugent, and I suppose the old Guelph and Ghibelline feeling still existed in a modified degree, and might have gone on existing from generation to generation, if it had not come to an end like a romance. When we were travelling in Switzerland in the autumn, we went on one mountain expedition to see the sun rise from some particularly romantic and unapproachable peak, with rather a large party, almost all of whom were strangers to us. By some accident I and my guide were separated from Mr. Lobyer and his guide; and as the guide could only speak some vile jargon of his own, and couldn't understand any language I tried him with, I found myself wandering farther away from my own party, on the track of a party of deserters who had started off at a tangent to see some other prospect, and to whom the guide imagined I belonged.

"I was very much annoyed at not being able to make myself understood, for I was very tired

of the snow, and the slipperiness, and the grand scenery, and was unromantically anxious to get back to the hotel, which I don't think I ever should have done if one of the deserters had not espied me following wearily in their track, and benevolently come to my assistance. He was an Englishman, but he could speak the guide's jargon, and he told the stupid creature what I wanted. Not content with this, he insisted on escorting me himself to meet my own party, and would not leave me till he had placed me in Mr. Lobyer's care. I suppose when poor shipwrecked creatures are picked up by a passing vessel, they are very likely to think that vessel the queen of ships; and I know that I thought my deliverer a most agreeable person. Of course Mr. Lobyer asked to whom he was indebted, and so on, and the two gentlemen exchanged cards, whereupon it appeared that my deliverer was no other than Sir Nugent Evershed. After this we met in the public rooms of the hotel. Sir Nugent was delightful, did not ignore the Eton business, but talked of it as a boyish folly, and said the old fogies who made a fuss about it had no right

to have interfered in the matter, and made himself altogether so agreeable that it would have been quite impossible for Mr. Lobyer or any one else to reject the olive-branch so gracefully offered. Beyond this, we found our prearranged routes were the same,—it was quite a romantic coincidence, Sir Nugent declared. We were fellow-travellers for some weeks: climbed mountains together, explored cathedrals together, inspected picture-galleries, dined together, stopped in the same hotels, until Mr. Lobyer and Sir Nugent became like brothers. We met again in Paris, where Sir Nugent, who is very musical, was a delightful companion at the Opera. Of course, when we came here the intimacy continued, and now we have no more frequent visitor than Sir Nugent."

"And you think that Mr. Lobyer really likes him?"

"Don't I tell you they are like brothers? How solemnly you look at me, Cecil! Have you any objection to offer to the reconciliation effected through accident and *me?* Would you prefer a continuation of the Guelph and Ghibelline feud?"

"No, indeed, Flory. Nothing can be better than this reconciliation if it is really quite sincere on both sides. But I fancy that the law of society sometimes obliges men to appear friendly who never can really be friends. Boyish quarrels are not very serious affairs, perhaps; but I should think it was difficult to forget a schoolboy enmity of the kind you have described. In plain words, Flo, I would strongly advise you not to encourage any intimacy with Sir Nugent Evershed. I may advise you, mayn't I, dear? I am older than you, Flory, you know."

"Every body in the universe is older than me, I think," answered the impetuous Mrs. Lobyer, "for every body seems to think that his or her special business in the world is to give me good advice. I think if ever I do any thing desperately wicked, and am taken prisoner and tried by a jury and written about in the newspapers, and all that sort of thing, I shall get my counsel to plead insanity, on the ground that my brain had been softened by the perpetual pressure of good advice. Now don't be angry with me, Cecil," cried the

wilful Florence, melting, after her own particular fashion, into sudden penitence; "I know you are the best and dearest friend I have in the world except papa, and I would do any thing to please you. But as to Sir Nugent Evershed, I have nothing to do with his intimacy with my husband. He comes here to see Mr. Lobyer, and I can't order him not to come."

"But these private theatricals, Flo. I suppose you invited Sir Nugent to take a part in them?"

"O yes; that was my doing, of course. When one has an elegant young man hanging about the house, one likes to make use of him."

"But you have so many elegant young men about the house."

"Very likely. But there is not one of them so clever as Sir Nugent. You see I had set my heart on our doing a comedy of Scribe's. There is such a rage for private theatricals just now, and I knew that the only chance of our distinguishing ourselves was by doing something French. The whole county will be pervaded by *The Lady of Lyons* and *Still Waters run deep;* but a comedy

by Scribe in the original will be a little out of the common. I know that Sir Nugent's accent is irreproachable, and he is the only man I can trust with the character of the Marquis."

"Is the Marquis a very important character?"

"Yes, he is the leading personage in the piece. Every thing depends upon him."

"Is Mr. Lobyer to take any part in your comedy?"

"O no. He calls all that kind of thing nonsense. There are quite enough people in the world ready to make fools of themselves without his assistance, he says. Polite, is it not? But Mr. Lobyer's mind is given up to the money-market. I think he has made a new commandment for himself: 'Thou shalt love the Royal Exchange with all thy mind, and soul, and—'"

"Flo!"

"O, of course it's very wicked of me to say that; but sometimes I feel as if the money-market were too much for my brain. It is so dreadful to have a husband whose temper is dependent on the state of trade, and who is sometimes sulky for a

whole day because gray shirtings have been dull. However, I suppose, on the other hand, it is a blessing to have a husband who sometimes makes four or five thousand pounds by a single stroke of business. I scarcely wonder that such men as Mr. Lobyer look down upon art, for art is really a paltry business compared to trade, in these days, when every thing is estimated by its money value. Papa is supposed to be at the top of the tree; but he gives a year's labour and thought to a picture for which he gets less than Mr. Lobyer can earn in a day, by some lucky transaction with America. O Cecil, how I detest trade, and all that appertains to it!"

This was not a very promising remark from the wife of a wealthy trader, and it was a remark which Cecil thought it safer to leave unnoticed. Flo's spirits seemed to have left her for the moment under the influence of the money-market. She gave a prolonged yawn, which was half a sigh, and then bade her friend good-night.

Cecil sat by the fire for some time that night, thinking rather sadly of the brilliant Mrs. Lobyer's

fate. For the present it seemed bright and fair enough, but what of the years to come? Very gloomy forebodings filled Cecil's mind as she thought of the unknown future which lay before the careless footsteps of that frivolous young matron.

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